

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in
**THE SECRET OF
WOLF FACE**





in

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OF
WOLF FACE**

The man lives alone on the coast. The neighbours hardly know him, and he rarely leaves the house—a lone wolf—or is he in reality Wolf Face, a suspected assassin? Before committing each crime, he sends the police a letter giving clues on his strike. He commits two burglaries and both times, he manages to escape. Even Jupiter, the brain of The Three Investigators, is baffled. Now Wolf Face sends the third letter. This time it is an attack on the president. Time is running out. Tomorrow, the president will come to Rocky Beach...

The Three Investigators
in
The Secret of Wolf Face

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(The Three ???: Wolf Face)

by

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1. Jupiter Gets a Beating

A warm ‘Ding Dong’ announced that a customer had entered the shop. Jupiter Jones smiled as he entered. He had recognized the door chime immediately, even though it was several years ago that he had been here with his aunt Mathilda. Now, he no longer accompanied her shopping, of course.

While his hand was still holding the door handle, he noticed that something was wrong. Almost physically, he felt the tension in the air. The elderly man behind the counter—it had to be Mr Laurent, the owner of the clothing store—gave him a forced smile.

Irritated, Jupiter lowered his gaze and looked around quickly. But nobody seemed to be here except him and the owner. The shop still looked exactly as he remembered it, nothing had changed. Even the exclusive clothing that was offered here was not very fashionable.

And Mr Laurent? He was behaving so strangely. He didn’t seem to recognize Jupiter. He was just a little boy then. Only now did Jupiter let go of the door handle. He said: “Good afternoon.”

Mr Laurent returned his greeting and squinted to the side.

Jupiter followed his gaze, but all he saw were a few coats hanging in a row on a clothes rack. Or was something moving there? He looked more closely. It was probably a deception. He clearly felt the eyes of the owner fixing on him.

It is probably the baseball bat that’s bothering him, thought Jupiter and turned the bat in his hand. Stupid thing too, of all days he had to drag it home from school, especially when he had no interest in sports in general and baseball in particular. But the sports teacher had given him the old bat as a donation to Uncle Titus’s salvage yard. “Take it, I give it to you,” he said. “Maybe you can get a few dollars for it.”

Jupiter took a step towards Mr Laurent. “Sir, it’s about the message...” he began.

Then everything happened very quickly. Like big black cats two men jumped at him. They must have been hiding behind the clothes rack. Jupiter felt a hard blow on his hand and he stumbled. The baseball bat dropped to the ground and rolled away. A brutal blow sent the First Investigator down as well. Side first, Jupiter hit the light marble floor hard. One man immediately jumped up and twisted his arms back so hard that it cracked. The second man pressed his knee against Jupiter’s neck.

Jupiter wanted to scream, but the air was getting short. Then cold metal touched his wrists. A click. Jupiter anxiously sought eye contact with the store owner. But Mr Laurent had disappeared into the back of the store.

“We finally got you, you crook!” cried one of the men. He pulled Jupiter’s arms further up and laughed sarcastically.

The second attacker also triumphed. “I never thought you’d be so stupid...” With a painful jerk, he pulled Jupiter’s head up by his hair. “Look at us when we talk to you!” cried the man.

“Grrrg grrrr,” Jupiter uttered. His brain was working at full speed. Somehow he had to get an overview of the situation, otherwise he was lost.

Questions shot through his head: Were the men after him? Was he the victim of a terrible mix-up? A kidnapping? Revenge? What did they want with him? That’s when Jupiter heard

the door to the back room open.

He rolled his eyes to be able to see at least a glimpse of what was going on. A pair of black shoes appeared and grey-pleated trousers.

“Who have you captured there?” asked a voice that seemed familiar to Jupiter. With difficulty, he turned his head further up. Then he breathed out hissing. He knew the face. The wire-rimmed glasses, the watchful eyes, and the slightly greying hair.

It was an old acquaintance—Inspector Cotta of the Rocky Beach Police Department! Salvation was at hand. At Cotta’s hand signal, Jupiter’s men let go. The inspector bent down to him. “I’m sorry, Jupiter. Did you hurt yourself?”

“I didn’t hurt myself. These two brutes hurt me,” said Jupiter, sitting up groaning. “I don’t really feel so well. What’s with these two fighting bulls there.”

“Well,” began Cotta, “fortunately you haven’t lost your sense of humour.” He faltered. “You know, Jupiter, they are, well, colleagues of mine, policemen.”

“Cops, Inspector?”

“Yes, Jupiter, I’m really sorry, you got caught in the middle of a police operation.” He nodded at the two men.

“Fred, Fritz, take his handcuffs off.” Reluctantly, one of the officers tampered with Jupiter’s wrists.

“Inspector,” a voice was heard. It belonged to Mr Laurent, who had emerged from his cover and looked carefully over the counter. “Inspector, that’s the robber!”

“No, certainly not, Mr Laurent,” Cotta replied. “This is Jupiter Jones, a good friend of mine. He is definitely not the culprit.”

“Jupiter Jones? The nephew of Mathilda Jones?”

“Yes, I am, Mr Laurent. Didn’t you recognize me?” Jupiter had regained his full height. Though he had lost some weight, he was still an impressively handsome boy—whose clothes had picked up some dust. So Jupiter began to tap his sleeves off. The others stood around him idly and watched him.

Slowly anger rose in Jupiter. “You could give me a hand with this,” he moaned at the two men who had just thrown him to the ground. He had the situation under control again. “Or are your hands not suited for such delicate tasks?”

The policemen looked irritated at Cotta, who nodded at them. Slowly and laboriously, the men began to smooth Jupiter’s jacket.

It seemed quite clumsy and Cotta could not watch it for long. “Enough! He ended the embarrassing scene and pulled Jupiter to him. “Let’s go to the office. But it’s probably too late anyway and the real culprit is warned. Mr Laurent, please stay here.” He led Jupiter to the back of the store. “That way.”

Only now did the First Investigator notice that one more person was present—a young woman was standing in the doorway and had observed the whole scene. Jupiter felt a sceptical look streaming from her blue eyes. Then she turned around and stepped back into the office.

Jupiter followed her and behind him, Cotta closed the door. The woman had leaned against the desk in the meantime. She was wearing jeans, but an expensive model, as Jupiter noticed. On her washed out sweatshirt there was still the crest of a university in Seattle.

“Who is that boy, Inspector?” she asked, hands in her pockets.

Cotta tugged his jacket straight. “Jupiter Jones, Miss Harding. Together with two friends, he runs a detective agency here in Rocky Beach in his spare time.” He smiled at Jupiter. “Our fiercest competition, so to speak. On the other hand, we owe a lot to them.”

“Well, The Three Investigators are doing what they can,” replied Jupiter, proud of Cotta’s praise. “Would you like to see our business card, Miss Harding?”

“A detective agency? For children? No, thanks!”

“As you wish.” Jupiter put the card back in his pocket. “Are you a cop too?”

“Not exactly,” Miss Harding replied.

Cotta took the floor. “Miss Hannah Harding is a police psychologist. I’ve called her in because we’ve been dealing with a rather strange case...”

“... which I’m sure you’ll be very reluctant to tell me,” Jupiter added. He was now in a conversational mood, all the more so when the psychologist appeared more monosyllabic.

Cotta smiled. “You three will figure it out after all... once you smell a rat.”

Under the disapproving looks of Miss Harding, Cotta pulled a note from the inside pocket of his jacket and handed it to Jupiter. The note was written in thick letters with an ordinary felt-tip pen.

Once upon a time, there was a man.

He walks down Kennedy Street. He shrugs his shoulders. It’s cold. He’s freezing. He has a firm intention. Three streets to go, the intersection is clear. The man crosses it and keeps going. He looks at his old pocket watch—5:50 pm. He thinks: “The president has left for London today.” Then the man reaches the long street. He walks along the sidewalk. Across the street is an exclusive clothing store. The owner is decorating an expensive coat.

The man stands still. He grins to himself and reaches into the plastic bag. His hand tightly clasps around the club...

From Wolf Face

Jupiter looked up. “Starts almost like a fairy tale,” he said hoarsely and coughed. “But then suddenly the text goes on in a completely different way.”

Cotta took back the note again. “So it is,” he said. “At first I thought it was complete nonsense. A madman who wants to scare me. I wanted to throw the note in the trash.”

Jupiter nodded and began to walk around. He occasionally did that when he thought aloud. He had taken it from television. “But then you noticed that it was a very usual letter,” he began. “It was about very concrete things. A long-established business is being threatened. You called in Miss Harding, a police psychologist, to assist you.” Cotta nodded.

Jupiter had stopped in front of him. “Some time ago you worked with another psychologist,” he remembered. “Mrs Ferguson. She was the one who helped us when Pete was kidnapped. I liked her a lot.” There was a resigned smile on Cotta’s face. He didn’t hear the slight undertone against Miss Harding.

“Cutbacks,” he mumbled. “That position of a police psychologist at the Rocky Beach job has been removed. We’re considered to be too small. Now when we need one, we have to request help from Los Angeles.”

Jupiter had looked at Miss Harding, and she didn’t bat an eyelid. He smiled and started moving again. “The writer, who calls himself Wolf Face, wants to play with you. You should unravel the message.”

Jupiter had to cough again before he could continue. “Inspector Cotta, I understand why you are waiting here with Mr Laurent. The letter is about expensive coats and an exclusive clothing store. It suggests that the man wants to rob a clothing shop and announces it in this

letter. Based on the information ‘Kennedy Street’, you realized that it had to be Mr Laurent’s shop, especially since there are not many such shops in Rocky Beach. It is located right on the main street. Before you get here, you have to cross an intersection. A time was also indicated. But on which day, on which date should everything happen? The line with the president told you—today the president flew to London for a short visit. You decided to set a trap for the man as a precaution, even though it seemed very unlikely at first that the man would actually strike.”

“Why?” the police psychologist interrupted him. “Because he was expecting the police to be waiting for him. His puzzle was not that difficult to decipher.”

Since Miss Harding was silent, Jupiter continued his contemplation. “Unfortunately, I interfered, and since I had a baseball bat, your colleagues immediately thought I was the culprit. Then I received the necessary courtesy.”

“Yes, uh, I do apologize again!” Cotta tapped him on the shoulder. “But that’s exactly how it was. Great, Jupiter!”

He nodded at Miss Harding, who hadn’t left her desk. “You see, Miss Harding, Jupiter Jones is a very bright boy.”

Miss Harding seemed unimpressed. “Did you make that big of a statement before the fight?” Jupiter felt the blood rise up inside him, but didn’t answer.

The police psychologist threw back her black hair. “Why did you come into Mr Laurent’s shop, Julius?”

“My name is Jupiter,” Jupiter said.

But there was no time to answer. They heard someone trigger the door chime of the shop. Cotta jumped to the office door and listened to what was going on in the shop. Jupiter and Miss Harding came up behind him. There was a muffled voice of an elderly woman asking for a scarf. Cotta grinned, relaxed and took a step back again.

“Hopefully the poor woman will not suffer the same fate as I did,” Jupiter quipped. “It’s unimaginable.” His ribs still hurt, not to mention his neck. He rubbed his swollen wrists. The boys at the police force were obviously a bit over-trained.

Hannah Harding had leaned against the wall. “Well, Jupiter,” she asked, this time a little sharper in tone. “What were you doing in the shop?”

Jupiter wanted to reply but Cotta’s mobile phone interrupted him. The inspector answered: “Cotta!... Yes, Cotta... No!... No!... What? ... No, no, no... We’ll be right there!”

“What happened, Inspector?” Miss Harding asked, before Jupiter could say anything. Cotta put the phone in his pocket. He looked scared.

“There’s been a robbery a few shops down the road!” he said.

2. The Man in the Mask

One after another—Inspector Cotta, Miss Harding and Jupiter—rushed through the sales area of the clothing store. Mr Laurent had just spread out a scarf on the counter. But his customer was not quite there. With her mouth open, the woman watched the absurd scene that was taking place in front of her.

“Fritz, Fred,” cried Cotta and turned briefly to the clothes rack. “We have to go... You two stay here. It could be a diversion!”

Jupiter was the last to reach the door. He still registered Mr Laurent’s unsettled look, then he ran down the street.

About ten shops away just before the next intersection, there was a shop selling everything from camping stoves to mountain climbing equipment—everything you need to survive in nature.

Jupiter saw from a distance that a couple was standing in front of the shop window and talking energetically with each other. He recognized the girl with the shaggy black hair immediately. She was one of the shop assistants there. He and his friend Pete had met her before when Pete bought his diving equipment there a few weeks ago.

Breathing heavily, Jupiter came to a halt. The shop window pane of the shop had been smashed and apparently some items on display were missing.

“Inspector Cotta,” Cotta just introduced himself. He pointed to his two companions. “Miss Harding, also of the police, and uh, Mr Jones, yes.”

“Joe Stapleton, owner of Outdoor World. And this is Sandy Allen, my sales assistant.” The store owner was very upset. “I’m glad you got here so fast. What a mess, the whole thing! What it’s gonna cost me just to get that broken window fixed.”

“When exactly did the robbery take place?” Cotta wanted to know.

“A few minutes ago, just before six. We were clearing a storage shelf at the back of the store. Suddenly we heard a bang and saw the broken glass window. By the time we came out, the robber was long gone.”

“And what’s missing?”

“That’s just it. A few days ago, I put special binoculars in my shop window. It cost over \$3,000. That’s gone!” Stapleton let his eyes wander across the display. “Otherwise, everything seems to be there. I don’t have a jewellery store, you know. My merchandise isn’t usually that expensive. That’s why there’s no special security glass or alarm system.”

“The climbing equipment,” said the young saleswoman, pointing to the display. “Some ropes and hooks have disappeared.” Jupiter noticed that she gave him a furtive look. Apparently, she recognized him as well.

Stapleton nodded. “Indeed. But this is too painful. It’s funny that the thief took these ropes and left the other valuable binoculars behind.”

While Jupiter listened, he inspected the display. ‘Extreme Sports—Climb High—Dive Low’ was written on a cardboard sign. Four more binoculars were still in the shop window, plus an expensive compass, a night-vision device, and a diving watch. He did not see a stone or any other object that could have been used to break the shop window.

Jupe turned his attention to the surroundings. Perhaps the perpetrator was still in the vicinity watching them, or there had been witnesses to the incident. He noticed a woman standing at a distance at the wall of the building and looking around indecisively over and over again. Had she observed something? Or was she just curious?

Jupe turned and walked towards the woman who was curiously looking at him. She must be around fifty. The two heavy shopping bags visibly affected the way she stood.

“Good afternoon,” he said when he got close enough to her. He smiled. “Did you happen to witness the robbery?”

The woman clutched her shopping bags even tighter. “Well,” she said. “You look a little young. Are you with the police?”

Jupiter smiled. “Jupiter Jones of The Three Investigators—a detective agency. You can tell me your observation. We help the police.”

“In that case...” She put her bags down. As it turns out, the woman witnessed the robbery from across the street where she’d been shopping.

“But it was only when there was a bang and the glass shattered that I looked more closely,” she reported. “The person put the club into a large plastic bag. Then he reached two or three times into the window, put something into the bag and ran away.”

“Do you remember what kind of bag it was?”

“Oh, yes, wait.” The woman thought for a moment. “Sax Sendler, yes, it was a plastic bag from Sax Sendler.”

“The music business!” Jupiter knew the store. It was part of a music agency that his friend Bob Andrews worked part-time. He smiled approvingly at the woman. “Very closely observed! You only spoke of a ‘person’. So you’re not sure if it was a man or a woman.”

She nodded. “Right. Hard to decide. Dark clothing—a dark coat. Above all, the person wore a mask.”

“A mask?”

“Yes.” She turned briefly, perhaps to look for passers-by. She paused, the image seemed to reappear before her. “The robber looked at me directly—very intensely. I still feel a shiver run down my spine thinking about it. Then the robber ran around the corner and disappeared.”

“What kind of mask was it?”

“That’s the funny thing. It was the face of the president. You know, that mask that’s been on sale everywhere the last few days. The president is supposed to come to Rocky Beach soon.”

“Yes, that’s right. He’s on a campaign trail and he’s gonna open a retirement home here.” Jupiter nodded thoughtfully. “Thank you very much. Your report is very valuable. I think you should report your observation to the inspector.” He helped her with the two shopping bags and accompanied the woman to Cotta and Miss Harding, who were still talking to Stapleton.

Meanwhile, Cotta had managed to bring the conversation back to the robbery. The shop assistant was no longer there. Then Jupiter decided to leave. He said goodbye to Cotta but didn’t go straight home.

Instead, he entered the Outdoor World store. Sandy, the sales assistant, had positioned herself by their diving equipment—somehow a harmonious picture, Jupiter found. He knew she knows about diving equipment well. She was about a head shorter than him, and also a little chubby. Jupiter realized that he liked her. A few weeks ago, he had probably paid too much attention to the different functions of diving equipment.

She played with an extra long strand of hair and looked him straight in the eyes. “We have met before. You were asking about measuring instruments with a friend the other day?”

“Good memory! It’s true, my friend Pete loves diving. I, for one, prefer to swim above the water.”

“Maybe it’s all about trying,” she smiled. “I don’t remember your friend much.”

Jupe blushed. “Uh, where were you again when the store window was smashed?” he abruptly changed the subject.

“Over there. By the diving goggles.” Sandy was still playing with that lock of hair. “I’m doing an apprenticeship here. Do you live in Rocky Beach?”

“Yes.” Jupiter coughed. “Sandy, how long do you usually leave the window display on?” he asked.

“Well, any display should stay like this for about two weeks. Wait a minute.” She gazed up at the ceiling indefinitely. “Well, I decorated it five days ago. I know for a fact because that day was my friend’s birthday.” She looked at him again. “Do you think the police will find who did this?”

“The police or... us,” Jupiter said.

“You?” The sales assistant was pruning. “Why are you with that inspector? You’re only a bit older than me...”

Jupiter cleared his throat and interrupted her. “There is something else, Sandy,” he said. “You noticed in the presence of your boss that some equipment for climbing is missing. I thought that was great!” He sensed immediately that he had diverted her attention again. “Can you tell me which items were missing?”

“Of course I do. A rope, harness, figure-8 belay device—for climbing.”

“Oh.” Jupiter pondered for a moment. “For the high mountains?”

“Yes. It’s for climbing in general as well. On steep walls.”

“Interesting.”

Sandy Allen waited for further questions, but Jupiter was satisfied. He pulled out the business card of The Three Investigators.

“Thank you very much,” he said emphatically. “If you think of anything else, this is where you can reach me.” He gave her the card. It said:



She studied the card. “Oh, investigators,” she said in surprise. “Your friend Pete’s in on this. And you’re even the First Investigator?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, I promise. I’ll definitely be in touch.”

“You live here too?” Jupiter asked.

“Yeah, I moved to Rocky Beach a few months ago.”

“Well, yes, we’ll be in touch.” Jupiter left the shop, not without taking one last look at her strand of hair.

Outside, Cotta and Harding were still arguing with the shop owner and the witness. Jupiter greeted them in passing. “I’ll call you later, Jupiter,” the inspector shouted after him.

“I hope you recover soon.”

“Never mind.” Jupiter quickened his pace. He was desperate to tell Pete and Bob what had happened.

3. Wrong Conclusions

“Jupe, why did you go to Mr Laurent’s shop?” Bob wanted to know. He had opened the last bottle of Coke and then spread out in one of the old armchairs that were supposed to make their headquarters a little more homey.

Headquarters was a discarded mobile home trailer parked in The Jones Salvage Yard operated by Jupiter’s uncle Titus and aunt Mathilda. Many years ago, Uncle Titus had given the three friends the trailer to be used as a club house. Subsequently, when they started their detective business, they transformed the trailer into their headquarters.

“What did I want in that clothing store?” Jupe sat in front of the computer and laboriously set up another screen saver. “Well,” he started in a still hoarse voice, “there was nothing special about it...” In the middle of the sentence he was interrupted. The door flew open and Pete entered.

“Hi, Jupe! Hi, Bob!” he started. “What’s so exciting that I had to cancel my swimming practice?” He turned to Bob. “Throw me a Coke!”

“I can’t. I’ve got the last one,” Bob said, grinning and taking a sip.

“What?” Pete got mad. “Weren’t you going to get a new box these days?”

“Our common fund is empty,” Bob said. “As empty as our Coke crate. And I wasn’t gonna steal any. We are detectives after all.”

“Well, in that case...” Pete drew a breath of air. “We urgently need a new case, where for a change maybe some pocket money will come,” he pleaded with exaggeration. This was the keyword for Jupiter.

“That’s why I called you,” Jupe explained. “So you can calm down!”

“It’s done.” Pete looked at his friend curiously, tapping his throat. “What do you sound like, Jupe? Did you do monologues at school again?”

Jupiter rolled his eyes and said nothing. Bob handed Pete the Coke bottle. “Just one sip, okay?” He kept an eye on his friend while he kept talking. “You got it wrong. Jupe’s got a good beating.” He sneered. “And guess from whom?”

“Beating? Really?” Pete exclaimed with interest and handed Bob the bottle back. “Tell me, Jupe! Was it Lys or perhaps Mrs Stone?”

Annoyed, Jupe looked up at the ceiling. Lys was a friend and Mrs Stone was his biology teacher. He did not enjoy arguing with either of them. “Stop the nonsense,” he grumbled. “It really wasn’t very pleasant.”

The First Investigator reported what had happened to him that afternoon. “You can hear how broken my voice sounds,” he finally said. “And here,” he pulled his shirt out of his jeans, “I’m bruised all over!”

Bob ignored him completely. “Strange,” he said. “A guy announces a theft and is stupid enough to do it even though the police are waiting for him.” He frowned in thought.

“Maybe it was just a coincidence,” Pete replied. He too was not interested in Jupiter’s bruises. “The letter and the theft at Outdoor World must have nothing to do with each other.”

Jupiter shook his head as he stuffed the shirt back into his pants in disappointment. “I don’t think so. It was exactly at the announced time. The letter spoke of a plastic bag. And in a plastic bag the thief also packed his loot. There was also mention of a club. He smashed the

window with it. And think of the clue to the president's trip to London and the mask the thief wore."

Bob agreed with him. "The person was almost willing to let the police make a connection between the robbery and the letter."

"Of course!" Jupiter's face brightened. "More so. Remember what the witness said—that he looked around, and he actually stared at her. He probably didn't do it out of fear of the public, but so that someone would remember the mask afterwards."

"Wow," Bob said.

Pete didn't seem quite convinced yet. "But why all this? A madman? To prove to the police that he's smarter than they are?"

"Maybe," Jupe said. "There is such a thing. At least Cotta called the police psychologist after receiving the letter."

Pete nodded. "And now? Shall we give Cotta a little help?" he asked hypocritically.

Jupiter grinned. "Of course! Now he won't get rid of us."

Pete took the Coke bottle that Bob had carelessly placed next to him.

"Hey," Bob cried out, but Pete had already taken the last sip.

Satisfied, he pushed the empty bottle onto the computer table. "And that police psychologist, Jupe, is she pretty?"

"Miss Harding?" Jupiter hesitated. "I didn't pay much attention to that."

"Typical Jupe," Bob remarked as he stared at the empty Coke bottle. "You've probably played some intellectual game of tag."

Jupiter nodded. "Something like that. I don't think she likes me very much."

"You're just a smart aleck!" Bob had already jumped behind the armchair, so that the computer's mouse pad, which Jupiter had immediately fired off, could not hit him. Instead it hit something behind a stack of files.

Pete went to see. "Well, friends," he said. "Guess what just broke down there?"

"Oh, no!" Bob cried.

"Yes! Our little glass bear, which we got from Chief Reynolds on his retirement. Jupe, you hit it right on target!"

Bob was stunned. "We've been wanting to mount it over the door for good luck."

"Then you'll just have to think of something new," said Jupiter and shrugged his shoulders. "Sorry."

Pete smiled at him. "Perhaps 'Beautiful Helen'?" He picked up a magazine from the floor. "It's on display in Rocky Beach right now! Look, her eyes are diamonds!" He waved the city magazine that had dedicated a cover story to the art exhibition. A rich producer from the movie industry had sponsored the small private museum for it.

"Sure, Pete, if she's so pretty, we'll take it, just for you," Bob remarked.

"In Greek mythology, Helen was the Queen of Sparta, and was known as the most beautiful woman in the world," explained Jupiter. "She was later abducted by a Trojan prince named Paris, so she was known as Helen of Troy."

"I want to see the exhibition," Bob said. "'The Greece of Beautiful Helen.' There is a figurine of Helen that is very valuable. It seems that there was also a Paris figurine, but it disappeared years ago. The exhibition is not gonna run much longer. But none of you want to go?"

"Thank you, but no." Jupe replied. Pete shook his head as well.

"As you wish," Bob said.

"All right." Jupiter pointed to the empty common fund, an old tin can where they usually keep their money. "Even if we have thirty years of successful detective work, we still

couldn't afford a figurine like that for good luck. I'd better look for something cheaper at the salvage yard." That ended the subject for him.

"Back to robbery, boys!" he called them to order. "There are a lot of strange things to talk about."

"We're very excited about this," said Pete.

"I was thinking more along the lines of you guys getting a little action for a change," Jupe said.

"Because you're so hoarse?" Pete winked at Bob, who took over before another battle of words could break out.

"You know my assessment. A thief announces his crime and then does it. That's strange. He might get caught."

"No." Pete shook his head. "Not if he directs the police to one place and then strikes somewhere else. He lied in the letter."

"Actually, he hasn't even done that yet." Jupiter stood up, which indicated he was about to give a lecture. Almost automatically, Bob and Pete leaned back in their chairs.

"He wrote in the letter about a club, a plastic bag and a clothes shop," explained Jupiter. "But he didn't actually mention that he was going to rob the clothing store. Cotta only concluded that."

"The letter just cut short. It might as well have gone something like this: 'His hand clasped the club. He was passing through the clothing shop. Only a few more metres to Outdoor World, the shop he was about to rob.'"

Pete interrupted the flow of thoughts. "Does that cute little shop assistant still work there?"

Jupiter smiled. "Yes," he replied. "The little girl with the lock of hair. Her name is Sandy. But you won't believe it," he added with relish and a big grin appeared on his face. "She only remembered me!"

"Maybe because you're so fat," Pete quipped. "That's what stands out."

"I love your direct approach, Pete. She's not really your type," Jupe hit back.

"But yours? How?" Pete continued. "You usually go for long-legged models."

"Hey, guys!" Bob held the mouse pad up in the air like a warning sign. "Back to our story! So what was that like? The perpetrator complicated everything by omitting the details?"

"Maybe it's a mystery," Pete threw in. "But it would be a strange puzzle. You can't really get anything out of it."

"It's not really a puzzle either." The First Investigator took the floor again. "There's something else behind this. This story isn't meant to be on the right track, but on a wrong one. The police are supposed to draw wrong conclusions. This is the trap into which the recipients of the letter are to fall into."

He glanced briefly in the air to put his thoughts in order. "The author plays with a phenomenon that psychology calls a mental model. Mental model creation involves integrating prior knowledge with what has been given. You automatically classify information into certain frames and contexts that you know or expect—even if it is not given and the reality looks completely different."

"Could you express yourself in such a way that your mentally-retarded friends can understand?" Pete said gruffly.

Jupiter puffed. "Well, I really don't talk that complicated! You're just complaining out of routine!"

"In a way, this is our mental model," Pete grinned.

“Huh?” Jupiter looked at him in surprise. “Oh, yes. Maybe. So, I give you an example... The man took the gun and slowly walked towards the woman. She looked at him, startled.”

Jupiter took a break. “Well, what are you thinking about?”

“That he’ll kill her right away,” Bob and Pete shouted as if from one mouth.

Jupiter smiled satisfied. “What if I told you the man is a hunter and there’s a storm brewing outside?”

Bob nodded. “Sure, then the story could go on in a very different way. For example, the woman only looks terrified because she’s afraid he might go hunting in this weather. So it’s harmless.”

“You see,” said Jupiter. “You had automatically put the little information from the story into a certain context. The letter from Wolf Face works the same way. It omits certain contexts so that you draw the wrong conclusions.”

“Basically, it’s like how a detective works,” Bob thought. “There’s a hidden story, but we only know bits and pieces of it. We try to find more of those fragments and see the picture they fit into.”

“You’re quite philosophical,” Pete marvelled. “Not a bad thought, Bob!”

Jupiter liked the comparison. “Only that Wolf Face is trying to lead us on the wrong track through the fragments. But that’s not all.” He took a dramatic pause to get his friends’ attention again. “I don’t think it was money he was after.”

“Because he left the other binoculars?” Pete thought for a moment. “Maybe he didn’t have enough time.”

Jupiter stood up in front of him. “Then why did he pack the relatively cheap ropes and harness? He could get them for a few dollars in any sporting goods store.”

“That’s right again, great detective,” Pete remarked.

“The binoculars, the diving watch and especially the night vision equipment are also very expensive. I took a good look at the price tags.” Jupiter took another dramatic pause. “And, fellas, the act was well-prepared. He knew that the decoration of a window would last for about two weeks. He must have inspected everything thoroughly before that. That was no coincidence.”

“He wants to make some kind of sign,” Bob said. “It might mean something.”

“I think so, too. Only what?”

Then the phone rang.

4. The Duel

“I thought you were still there, boys,” Inspector Cotta’s voice came from the loudspeaker.

“Good evening, Inspector!” Jupiter winked at Pete and Bob. “You’re quite right, we are thinking about this strange theft.”

“You still sound very hoarse,” Cotta remarked, but he didn’t stay long at Jupiter’s well-being. “So? Do you have any insights?” he wanted to know.

“Well, Inspector. We suspect that the thief was not interested in the items. He was trying to tell you something.”

“That’s just what Miss Harding suspected as well,” said the inspector. “I’m beginning to be convinced. What makes you think so?”

“Well, because, he left some valuable binoculars in the shop window, for example.”

“Well, that’s right,” Cotta agreed.

Jupiter coughed. He was a little annoyed that Miss Harding had come to the same conclusion as he had. But there was another aspect he wanted to address. “There’s one thing I’m still not clear about, Inspector.”

“What’s that?”

“Why did you immediately take police action in response to this letter? I mean, you must get these mysterious, anonymous letters all the time.”

“Indeed, Jupiter,” Cotta explained. “But mostly those are threatening letters against the police or they really contain completely crazy stuff. But here, it was not about revenge against me, but about the announced threat to a respected fellow citizen. And also...” The inspector seemed to hesitate for a moment.

“And what else?” Bob and Pete asked from behind the scenes.

Cotta laughed. “And also the sender has added a cover letter to his story.” The friends exchanged meaningful looks. “In it, he announces a total of three cases. Each one, as he wrote, would be a step up, even grander. The last one would be a real blast. And after that... bye-bye forever.”

They remained silent, thoughtful. Then Jupiter said: “So there is more to come?”

“Indeed, Jupiter.”

“So? Has he called again?”

“Not yet,” Cotta said. “But why don’t you come by my office tomorrow morning at nine? We’ll talk about it then. Maybe you’ll come up with another brilliant idea.”

Jupiter exchanged a glance with Bob and Pete, who both nodded eagerly.

“We’ll be there, Inspector.”

“Good. Say hi to your friends.”

“Thank you.”

Jupe hung up.

“Wow,” Pete said. “This is the first time Cotta has asked us for help.”

“He appreciates us for our imagination,” Bob remarked. “Uh, excuse me, Jupe, of course, for your intelligence.”

“Hey,” Jupe said, “now we need both imagination and intelligence. But now, I am thirsty.”

The next morning, Cotta welcomed them up personally at the entrance of the police station. As they passed through the first floor, they were stopped by two men carrying a table out from the dining room. They set it down and greeted the inspector.

"Tonight there will be a party," Cotta explained. "Some tables will be moved to the conference room."

Then they entered the conference room, where Miss Harding and a younger man were already there. The man greeted them with a friendly smile. Miss Harding introduced the man: "Scott Ambler, my assistant."

"If Inspector Cotta gets reinforcements, I can too," she explained with a cool smile.

Cotta pointed to the table. "Please sit down," he said. "There is a new development this morning. I have to get my file from my office."

Jupiter stuck with Scott Ambler. "Is the seat next to you still free?" he asked. Mr Ambler invited him with a gesture of his hand and Jupiter sat down.

Jupiter liked the assistant more than the psychologist from the start. But with Pete it was the other way round. Scott Ambler looked quite friendly, but he was more interested in Miss Harding. She couldn't have been with the police long, he thought. She seemed younger than Ambler. Jupiter could have told him she was a good-looking woman. He grinned inside himself. It was typical that the First Investigator didn't notice that.

Pete took a seat next to her. He noticed her curious side glance. "With you as my boss, I will apply to the psychology department immediately when I finally graduate from school," he opened the conversation, but in a subdued voice out of consideration for Jupiter.

But it wasn't quiet enough—a bitterly angry look from Jupiter hit him, which increased in intensity when Miss Harding agreed with Pete.

"You'd have a good chance," she explained with a smile. "Well, you'd better hurry up and get your degree."

Then Cotta came back and closed the door behind him. He sat down at the head of the table and spoke. In a few short sentences, he summarized what had happened so far. He emphasized that he could use any idea and that was why he had asked The Three Investigators to join him.

Then the door opened. A policeman stepped inside. "Excuse me, Inspector." He handed Cotta an envelope. "We have checked the envelope and the contents. And again no usable fingerprints. This is a photocopy of the letter."

"Thanks, Fred," Cotta said. With a suspicious look at Jupiter, the policeman left the room.

"Okay," Cotta continued. "This came in the morning mail for me. As Fred said, we can't get any fingerprints."

Cotta unfolded the photocopy and laid it on the table in front of him. His expression was tense.

"Listen," he said. "It's another story." Slowly he read out the contents of the letter:

The man is leafing through the newspaper. His gaze falls on a main headline: '12-year-old boy kidnapped in L.A.?' The man smiles. Lonely boy hiding behind the front door. The man walks through his house where he lives alone and checks the situation in the basement. Then he goes shopping. He gets pasta salad, family pack. He gets two loaves of white bread. Satisfied, he gets in his car and drives back. He rubs his hands in anticipation.

From Wolf Face

For a moment there was silence. Bob, who was sitting next to Cotta, clearly saw Jupiter pinching his lower lip. He was about to give a first analysis, but apparently he wanted to let the adults go first. Bob knew how difficult this was for him, but it was definitely wiser that way—especially since Jupiter quickly got a reputation for being cheeky and precocious anyway.

Bob's eyes fell on Pete, who continued to be distracted by Miss Harding's presence. No comment could be expected from him. At the moment, his friend was watching the psychologist playing with her silver bracelet.

So her brain was also running at full blast. This was also noticed by Scott Ambler, who looked at his supervisor expectantly. Bob looked at him more closely. A medium-sized, nice-looking man in his thirties with a winning smile. I wonder if he admired his supervisor. She was younger than him, professionally successful, good-looking, and smart...

"Well?" said Cotta, looking around questioningly.

"Child abduction," said Miss Harding. "This should take the case into another dimension. The man seems very secured."

"No," Jupiter intervened. "He's faking it, Miss Harding. I don't believe it involves child abduction. It's just a meaning that we give to the text. It's a false context designed to mislead us. Don't you see that? The newspaper headline; a lonely boy; the situation in the basement—these are all words designed to throw us off track. In the first letter too, the writer had evoked a false context!"

Bob had followed his friend's explanations with mixed feelings. 'Evoke'! What a word! That probably meant something like evoking. Then he looked at Miss Harding.

Jupiter's mere presence seemed to annoy her already. This was clearly noticeable. Bob had to intervene now before Miss Harding allowed herself to be provoked. "You think he's bluffing, and that he's up to something else, Juve?" Bob quickly summed up.

He turned to Cotta. "Is there even a kidnapped child?"

Cotta nodded thoughtfully. "I did check. A boy went missing yesterday in Los Angeles—12 years old, son of an actress. But nothing has yet been reported of a kidnapping."

"This letter is a letter of confession," Miss Harding said coolly, without looking at Jupiter. "It's possible he has kidnapped the boy and is now making fun of us. Why can't we interpret it that way?"

Miss Harding smiled at Jupiter at an angle. "And besides, not everything in the first letter was a lie. Well, what do you think Wolf Face is up to, Julius Jones?"

Jupiter was sitting upright now. His face had turned red. "Unfortunately, I don't know either!" he cried. "But you jumped to conclusions, Miss Harding. Wolf Face is playing with us. Cat and mouse. You're a psychologist, you must realize that."

Miss Harding couldn't hold back any longer. "Premature conclusion, eh? Who do you think you are?" she thundered. "Listen, you... schoolboy, who among us is the expert here? You sit around and talk precocious like your grandmother!"

"But, Miss Harding," the inspector tried to placate her.

"My grandmother doesn't speak at all anymore," Jupiter remarked dryly. "She has been dead for many years."

The psychologist cleared her throat. "Excuse me," she said. She turned to Cotta. "But I think, Inspector, we should refrain from using the boys. It is only for their own safety. In the case of theft, it may still be possible, but in the case of child abduction..."

“... which has not been proven,” Jupiter interrupted her, but Miss Harding was no longer listening.

“When it comes to child abduction, the heat is definitely too much.” To underline her point, she struck her hand on the table. Cotta was impressed. Pete looked at her surprised.

Then Scott Ambler, who had listened with interest the whole time, took the floor. “But, Miss Harding, with the boys, on the other hand, it’s so refreshing...”

“Mr Ambler,” she cut him off. “I’m sorry, I am sorry, but the protection of children comes before any kind of refreshing activities that they might bring.”

“Yes, of course.” Ambler looked intently at his hands and avoided the looks of others.

The psychologist looked expectantly at Cotta. The eyes of the others were also fixed on him.

“Yes, uh,” the inspector hesitantly began, “if this is indeed a, uh, kidnapping—I’m sorry, boys. The possibility exists, so it’s not impossible—then it’s really not responsible if you’re still involved.” His voice got stronger. “Well, I’m sorry, but I’m afraid I have to agree with Miss Harding on this point.”

Satisfied, the police psychologist let herself fall back into the chair.

Jupiter got up. “Come on,” he said to his two friends. “Let’s go.”

“Now wait,” Cotta said. “There’s no need to leave so hastily.” Pete had remained seated while Bob was already standing around indecisively.

“Go, Pete,” Jupiter pushed. Reluctantly, Pete pushed back his chair and stood up.

“Good riddance,” Jupiter snapped and he was the first to leave the room. The other two followed.

They had only taken a few steps when Cotta came after them. “Don’t be angry, boys. But it’s really not possible. I thought I’d have to make amends for Jupiter getting involved with the police, but probably that was a mistake.”

Jupiter turned away gruffly.

“There’s one more thing,” Cotta said. “About the police party here tonight, you’re invited. Even the mayor is coming.”

“We’ll think about it,” Jupiter said.

5. The Police Party

They swung themselves onto their bicycles. It was a hazy, humid day, quite unusual for sunny California. But it matched the depressed mood of The Three Investigators.

On the street, they passed an improvised kiosk where you could get the mask of the president. Jupiter stopped to look at one.

"The creator of these masks makes a pretty good living," Bob said, looking at the price tag. He took a mask in his hand and examined it. "It's far too expensive."

The salesman, smoking a cigarette in a doorway a few metres away, came up. "Wanna buy one?" he asked, blowing the smoke at Bob.

"No, thanks," Bob said.

Jupiter pulled Bob away. "When the president arrives, I bet half of Rocky Beach will be walking around with this thing."

"We'll be in the other half," Bob claimed. He was concerned about Pete's silence. The little incident between his two friends at the police department was still going on.

On the bicycle ride back to Headquarters, Pete worked the pedals so hard that Bob could hardly keep up and Jupiter even arrived at the salvage yard a few minutes later. In return, the first positive surprise of the day awaited them in front of the trailer—a box of Coke and three sandwiches protected by a plastic sheet.

A small donation from Aunt Mathilda was written on an enclosed note, "So that the detectives regain their strength and do not run out of intelligence and imagination."

"Thank you, Aunt Mathilda," Bob said, carrying the box into Headquarters. There he was greeted by a second surprise. Jupiter had actually searched the salvage yard in the morning and found a small figure, which he had also attached to a board just above the door. It was the plaster figure of a former American president. Extremely fitting, thought Bob.

Pete stumbled in and threw himself into one of the chairs. He held his peace. His face spoke volumes. Bob pointed to the new figure above the door and tried a joke. But Pete did not react.

A little later, Jupiter arrived in the trailer, read Aunt Mathilda's note and took a sandwich. He ignored Pete completely, but he obviously liked the sandwich.

No one said a word. Bob opened a bottle of Coke and leaned back expectantly. Who would be the first to lose his nerve? He bet on Pete and did not have to wait long for his prediction to be confirmed.

"Jupe, you fool," it broke out of Pete. "Because of you, we're sitting here instead of being on the pulse of the action..."

"Because of me?" cried Jupiter in the middle. "Really? You'd rather sit next to your new flame and hold hands so she doesn't explode again?"

"Shut up!" Pete jumped up. "You're just jealous. I think she's cool, so what? And if you weren't so smart, things wouldn't be so bad!"

"Gee, Pete. It wasn't the smart thing, as you call it. The stupid bitch booted us out because she doesn't like me, and..." Jupiter looked angrily at the Second Investigator, "so Wolf Face wouldn't hurt her dear little Pete."

Pete gasped for breath. "Utter nonsense! The case being too dangerous was only an excuse because the way you talked got on her nerves! I should have just stayed in my seat."

"Yeah, ha ha, as her lapdog!" Jupe snapped.

Pete grabbed the mouse pad, Bob tried to jump in, but it was too late. The mouse pad sailed through the air and hit the president.

"No!" Bob whispered. "He's falling off the pedestal!"

With a thud, the president landed on the floor. Several pieces of plaster splattered across the room.

"Stop it now," Bob yelled at a volume that surprised even him. "Look at what you're doing. The best thing you can do is go out there and fight in the yard! And have a real fight!" He gasped for breath. "You make me want to puke!"

Jupiter and Pete looked at each other and suddenly smiled.

"Great performance," Pete said. "Oh, boy."

"All respect," replied Jupiter. "Really, very impressive, Bob. So, Pete. I guess we'll have to. Peace?"

"Okay, peace," Pete replied.

Bob coughs, bends down and pushes the larger plaster pieces together with his hand. "The president has fallen," he said, "if that isn't a bad sign."

"Well, we'll just have to get the lovely Helen!" Jupe said.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "But we'll put her behind safety glass."

Jupiter stretched. "All right, all right," he said. "I'll go back to the salvage yard later and look around for something cheap."

After peace was restored, they quickly agreed to accept Cotta's invitation to attend the police party in the evening. In view of the fact that hardly any party could be safer than in the centre of the police power in Rocky Beach, even their parents and guardians would not mind that they would be out a little later.

"They won't drink too much," Bob's father had commented and his mother had added: "I'm sure it's a drug-free zone."

"But the music will suck," Bob added. "Maybe I should bring some of my new CDs."

"But please, not the ones you play all day long," his mother replied. "Otherwise the party will be over before it even starts." Bob pulled a face.

"Times change, Mum. Your parents weren't always happy with your taste in music either," Bob said.

Bob's father nodded and took his wife in his arms. "That's for sure! Remember, Mrs Andrews, when we first..."

Bob withdrew discreetly. He was only marginally interested in his parents' exploits at the moment. More important was what he should wear that night. How would someone dress at a police party? He decided on his new jeans and shirt. He quickly put a tie on.

Bob drove his Beetle and arrived at Headquarters at 6 o'clock sharp. The First Investigator sat in the armchair drinking an orange juice. Bob had to smile. Jupe too, had chosen jeans and a fresh shirt. A little later, Pete arrived. He was undoubtedly the best dressed of the three and had even put on his infamous flower tie.

"Isn't that a bit excessive," Jupiter received him and plunged his index finger into his chest.

Determined, Pete pushed his friend's arm back. "Well, the mayor is coming..."

The phone interrupted his explanation. Jupiter jumped up and had reached for it. "... Oh, yes, it's you! ... I'm glad you called," Jupiter suddenly spoke much more quietly. "Yes, my voice is fine again. Thank you... Did you think of anything else? No? ... I see... No, I can't

tonight, hmm... Yes, maybe tomorrow... Dive? In this cold... and we could do the exhibition... Well... Yes... I'd like that... Okay... and thanks for calling, bye!" Jupiter hung up and his two friends noticed that he blushed.

"Let's guess," Pete said and leaned back. He winked at Bob. "Come on, buddy. What do you think? Shall we try—what's the name of his psychological model—uh... our mental models! So who called?"

"Well then, as I can see, it was a woman," Bob began. He smiled.

Pete nodded. "Yes, Bob, otherwise Jupe would not have lowered his voice and spoken in such succinct words—because he is embarrassed in front of us."

"I also suspect that she has a long strand of black hair," Bob's grin widened.

"Yes, there are many indications of this, especially Jupe's red face," Pete remarked.

"Yeah, and she wanted to go out with our leader tonight." Now Bob was smiling up to his ears. "Yes, but unfortunately Mr Jones has to make do with us. Poor guy. Sandy does not only want to teach him diving."

"Now shut up," cried Jupe, but he had to laugh. "You are beautiful colleagues to me! Why don't you leave me alone for once!"

"You're right. It can't always be me," Pete said soberly. "But now let's get going before Jupe changes his mind and decides to go diving tonight."

The parking spaces in front of the Police Department were already all occupied, so Bob unceremoniously placed his Beetle in the no parking zone. "Nobody's checking it tonight anyway," he commented as he turned off the engine.

Jupiter nodded. "You're right. But also for Wolf Face it is a good opportunity to strike. All the police officers of Rocky Beach are gathered here. Well, I'm curious."

"I have a funny feeling about this too," Bob agreed. "Especially since we still have no idea what's really behind the new letter." He let Pete, who was sitting in the back seat, out and locked the car.

Together they went over to the building. Loud music came towards them. "Not bad at all," said Bob, who knew the music, of course.

"Look at those guys," Jupiter said, pointing to the front door where two men were posted. "Those were the two policemen who attacked me at Mr Laurent's shop."

"It's a miracle you're still alive," Bob said appreciatively, but also a little ironically. "By the way, Jupe, you still haven't told us what you were doing in the shop."

Jupiter started to explain, but by now they had reached the door.

"Good evening," the two policemen said as if from one mouth and looked at them uncertainly.

"Evening, Fritz and Fred," said Jupiter confidently. "These are my friends. Inspector Cotta has invited us."

"Of course." The policemen stepped aside to let them pass.

Then Cotta came to meet them. He was wearing old jeans and a simple sweatshirt. "You three look nice," he said to them.

"Uh, we thought since the mayor is here..." Pete started.

"You thought, Pete," Jupe said. "Not me."

Cotta laughed. "The police party has evolved from the birthday party for a colleague. So it was more of an informal gathering. Even the mayor comes in a T-shirt. Just today, he also put on his sweater. It's unusually cool in Rocky Beach. Follow me."

Cotta made an inviting gesture and led them up to the conference room. After they entered, Jupiter gave Cotta a large cake, which he had carried in a bag. "From my aunt," he said. "She said we shouldn't come empty-handed."

"Wouldn't have been necessary," thanked Cotta. "You are guests of honour."

He walked across the conference room and put the cake on a big table with all kinds of food already prepared. A policeman approached the inspector and engaged him in conversation. Cotta waved to the three boys. "Go and get yourself a drink."

The three looked around. Bob found the room decoration very original. Handcuffs and balloons were hanging from the ceiling. And there were these collages of prison scenes stuck to the walls. Different faces were incorporated into each picture and were individually illuminated by spotlights. Presumably, the pictures had been assembled using a computer software. He recognized Fred and Fritz in the photo.

Bob nudged Pete and said "Look, that's Chief Reynolds." Chief Reynolds had supported The Three Investigators in their investigations until his retirement. In the meantime, this role was played by Inspector Cotta, who, as Bob discovered, was also in the photo.

Loud rock music came out from an adjacent room. Police lights from emergency vehicles provided the light show. Some guests helped themselves with food and drinks at the buffet table. Bob felt his appetite growing as he watched a policeman cut a large piece of Aunt Mathilda's cake.

Jupiter interrupted him. "Oh no! Miss Harding is standing at the pillar. Maybe I should have gone diving after all." He turned his back on her demonstratively.

"Don't panic, I'll handle the psychologist," Pete promised and nudged him. "Scott Ambler will be there."

Two new guests arrived and put a bowl of salad on the table with the other dishes. It was the last available space, right next to a basket of white bread.

"We were lucky to have the cake, Jupe," Bob commented. "Everybody brings food here." Jupiter did not react.

"Jupe, what is it? Is Harding's presence annoying you?" Bob said and turned to Pete. "Hey, look at our leader!"

"Pretty pale, yes. I think he needs a Coke," Pete suggested.

"That's it!" said Jupiter and slapped his hand on his forehead.

"Well, did you hear him? The leader is thirsty!" Pete remarked. "Get him something, Bob."

"It's not that," replied Jupiter, drawing his two friends to him. "Wolf Face! I believe he will strike tonight. And right here!"

6. Amongst Police Officers

Pete and Bob looked at him in astonishment. “What makes you think of that? He’s supposed to be looking after the kidnapped kid.”

“No, it was a diversion. He only reads about the kid in the papers. Everyone reads the paper. You have to trust me on this.”

“The food,” Bob said thoughtfully and nodded. “That’s what you mean. The salad—the family pack he gets from the supermarket. And the white bread. He’s not buying all this for the boy, he’s buying it for the party tonight.”

“That’s right, Bob,” Jupe said.

“Man!” Bob remarked.

Pete had doubts. “And the line ‘Lonely boy hiding behind the front door...’”

“I don’t know,” Jupiter said. “Perhaps it refers to the writer himself.”

Bob was all tingly. “Should we tell Cotta?”

“After the excitement this morning?” Jupiter shook his head. “No, thanks. I think we’ll look around ourselves. It’s just a hunch.”

Bob nodded. Pete preferred it that way too. “Okay. And besides, a false alarm would be pretty embarrassing.”

“Yes.” Jupiter drew his friends even closer. “Only what could he be up to? There are few clues—binoculars, ropes, plastic bag, mask, family pack. How do we put them together?”

They had stuck their heads so close together that they no longer paid attention to their surroundings.

“Well, are the wires running hot again?” Startled, they turned around. Miss Harding stood behind them, the look on her face suggested that at least she wasn’t looking for a fight. “Sorry about this morning, Jupiter,” she said to the amazement of the three. “Actually, you’re pretty nice guys.”

“Yes,” Jupiter just mumbled.

Miss Harding hesitated for a moment, then decided to move on. “Have fun tonight. Keep your eyes open.”

“Does she suspect anything?” Bob asked when she was out of earshot.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. “I do not think so. Why did she suddenly take this friendly route?”

“Because she’s actually quite nice,” Pete replied. “You have provoked her with your mannerism.”

“Now do not defend the tyrannical goat again,” Jupiter grumbled and looked at him angrily.

“I want something to eat!” Bob changed the subject to avoid another confrontation. He headed resolutely towards the buffet. The others followed without looking at each other. The salad plate in Jupiter’s hand already looked quite full. Unimpressed, the First Investigator put a large soup spoon in the bowl with the pasta salad.

“Well, you haven’t lost your appetite yet,” Bob noticed and took a salad. “How about you, Pete?”

"I do." Undecided, the Second Investigator stood next to his friends and watched them eat. That Wolf Face could strike tonight worried him more than he was willing to admit. What did they have to prepare for?

"I hope that man doesn't blow up the whole place," Bob said half in jest. "The opportunity is rarely favourable. The entire police force in one place. And us too..."

"Bob, stop it," Pete asked. "I think we should tell Miss Harding."

"Are you crazy?" Jupiter snapped.

In shock, Pete took a step back and suddenly stepped on another shoe. Pete turned around. "Oh, excuse me, ah, Mr Mayor!"

"You're welcome, young man." The mayor of Rocky Beach smiled and walked away with his plate.

Jupiter and Bob smirked. "You stained your tie, Pete," remarked the First Investigator. "When have you ever been so jumpy?"

"Well, should I sit back and relax?" Pete asked and rubbed his tie with a napkin. The stain became even bigger. The mood was spoiled for him. "I think we should go."

"No, we'll stay and look around," Jupiter decided.

Bob helped himself to the ice. "I've been looking around all this while," he said. "But what should we look out for?" He let his eyes wander. He didn't know most of the guests.

Ambler looked straight out of the dance room and disappeared again. There was no sign of Miss Harding. The mayor was talking to Cotta.

"Perhaps the culprit is after our mayor," Bob said, chewing.

"That would probably be a bit too bold," said Jupiter. "But I must admit, I have no better idea to offer."

"But I do," Pete suddenly said. "What if the pasta salad is poisoned? The letter said something about salad."

Jupiter turned pale. "Don't I find that very funny," he said.

"Would fit, though," said Pete, glad he had decided not to eat. "Do you feel anything yet?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," said Jupiter and tried to ignore the emerging pressure in his stomach. That could of course also be due to the Coke. It had been very cold. Nevertheless, Jupiter put his plate on the table. He looked a little pale. Even Bob didn't touch the ice.

"Actually, a poisoned salad makes no sense," Juve said, but he only said it to calm himself.

"Let's do something," Bob suggested. "Let's sniff around a little. I can't stand it here anymore."

"Okay." Jupiter was happy to be distracted. "Maybe it's not so wrong to look around outside the party."

Just as they were leaving the room, they were stopped.

"Well, am I wrong or aren't those my three friends?"

"Chief Reynolds!" exclaimed Jupiter in surprise. "It's great to see you again! How's retirement?"

"Oh, I spend my time writing down exciting cases I've experienced." He laughed. "Some of which involved you three." They nodded proudly.

"So, are you all on a hot streak again?" Reynolds asked.

"As always, Chief," Jupiter replied in a very meaningful way.

Reynolds winked at them. "Tell me when you've solved the case," he asked. "Maybe I'll write the story up for you."

“Certainly, Mr Reynolds,” Jupiter said.

The former chief patted Jupiter on the shoulder and disappeared smiling into the party. The three of them grinned at each other. At least there was one pleasant encounter tonight.

Then they remembered their task and began to examine the corridor they had walked along with Cotta in the morning. The bass of the music system thudded muffled through the bare walls.

“There’s not a soul here,” said Pete. “They’re all hanging out at the party. If we could just get a clue...”

Most doors were locked. Pete and Bob tried every handle. Only one of the doors could be opened. But in the office behind them they could not find anything conspicuous.

“If somebody’s watching us, they must think we’re up to something,” Bob surmised. “How are we gonna explain it?”

“But nobody is watching us,” Jupiter claimed. “They’re all in the conference room.”

“Maybe Wolf Face,” Pete said, looking around.

“So we should split up,” Jupiter suggested. “We might find something sooner.”

“Not with me,” Pete replied. “I’ll should stay right here. I can see how this is gonna turn out.”

Bob pushed him into the side. “You think you’re gonna get in trouble?”

“It’s mostly like that,” Pete replied. “I seem to attract trouble.”

“Well, yesterday it was more like Juve,” Bob remarked.

“It’s about time!” Pete cried, and decided to follow on.

In the meantime, they had arrived at the end of the corridor. A staircase led to the second floor. They climbed up the stairs. Still, they did not encounter anyone.

“I have an uncanny feeling,” said Pete as they stepped into the unlit corridor of the second floor. “Shall I turn on the light?”

“No! If Wolf Face is hanging around here, he will immediately notice that someone is here,” Jupiter replied. He stopped. “Hey, now we will separate. You two can take the right side if you like, I’ll take the left one. Don’t panic, we will stay in sight.”

Reluctantly Pete and Bob set off. Jupiter watched them go and then he went to the first door. He pushed the handle. It was locked. He felt a slight pressure in his stomach. He probably ate too quickly earlier, so he calmed down. A few doors away Jupiter thought he heard a noise.

He listened, but soon had to realize that it was no use. The music from the party masked everything. Jupiter looked around. Pete and Bob had disappeared. Maybe it hadn’t been such a good idea to split up after all, he thought.

His stomach gurgled. “Quiet,” whispered Jupiter. There it was again! A crackling behind the door! From the small sign that was attached to the door, he could tell that he was standing in front of the weapons room. Jupiter felt his nervousness rise. Something mysterious was going on in there.

Reluctantly he put his hand on the door handle. Again the room creaked. Then there was a thud.

Carefully Jupiter pushed the handle down. He hoped the visitor was too busy to watch the door. His heart was pounding. He paused and turned around. Pete and Bob hadn’t shown up yet. If he called them, Wolf Face would hear him, he thought.

Then he hesitated to push the door handle down. No, it was too dangerous! Pete and Bob would probably be here any minute.

Jupiter leaned against the door very slightly. But it did not give way. Then he decided to push the handle down. The door was locked. How had Wolf Face got in? All of a sudden it

became quiet behind the door. Then Jupiter heard a window breaking. The climbing rope, the hooks, Jupiter thought. That was it! He had got in from the outside!

“Pete, Bob!” cried Jupiter. He ran and rushed to the stairs. “Come here, he was here, Wolf Face! He’s running away across the courtyard! Let’s get him!”

7. A Weapon is Missing

“Where have you been,” cried Jupiter as he leapt down the stairs with astonishing agility. He was followed by Bob, who was the first to respond to his calls.

“We found a room full of newspaper clippings of Rocky Beach criminals,” Bob said panting. “There were a few of ours in there too.” He took two steps at a time and caught up with the First Investigator’s lead.

But Jupiter reached the end of the stairs before him. Just as he was about to turn the corner, he felt a blow. He was twirled around and found himself on the floor slightly dazed.

“Look who’s here,” he heard a low voice. “Mr Jupiter Jones.”

Jupiter rubbed his eyes. The two policemen, Fritz and Fred, was standing in front of him. Pete and Bob stood close behind him. Fred put his hands on his hips. “What are you doing here?” he asked. “There is no party on this floor.”

“We know that,” Jupiter stammered. “The courtyard, sir, we urgently need to go to the courtyard. Someone’s running away—a burglar! He’s fleeing, quickly!”

“Burglar? Courtyard? From the second floor?” One of them said. “Let’s take it slowly and one at a time.”

The other policeman interrupted him. “Fred, maybe we should leave them alone, otherwise Cotta will make a fuss about us again later,” he said cautiously.

“He’s going to make a fuss if we can’t explain to him exactly what’s going on,” Fred replied. “Well, fire away, boys.” His tone was a little more friendly now, but he didn’t move an inch.

Valuable time passed. After everyone had talked in confusion at first, Jupiter finally took the floor and explained his suspicions in brief sentences.

“You mean Wolf Face was there?” Fred said. “Let’s go boys, let’s check it out.”

The group started to move but was immediately stopped again because two men rolled a beer barrel through the corridor.

“All this can’t be true,” Jupiter moaned. “Are we in a Hollywood comedy?”

Fred and Fritz unceremoniously hoisted the barrel out of the way. When they were finally downstairs, there was another problem. The door to the backyard was locked. Of course there was no key inside.

“Is there any other way to get into the courtyard?” Jupe nervously asked. If this went on like this, Wolf Face would escape again.

Fred nodded. “Sure, through the driveway. But you have to run around the whole block first, and the gate is closed.”

“Okay,” said Jupiter and whispered to Pete, “Get your toys out, Pete.”

He turned back to the cops. “Please check if Wolf Face is out there and secure the gate!” Jupiter had spoken so determinedly that the two nodded and disappeared.

Pete pulled the small black case out of his pocket, which he always carried with him. Quickly he had found the right lock pick. It was not difficult to open the lock. They sprinted into the yard. But nobody was there.

The few illuminated windows only dimly lit the inner courtyard. Jupiter did not see any opportunities to hide. Even at the end of the exit, everything was quiet. Jupiter looked up the

wall of the building.

“Bummer,” he said. The wind gently swung a rope back and forth along the wall. Wolf Face had fooled them again. He had attached the rope to the roof and escaped from there! And they had run down into the yard!

Disappointed, the three friends went back to the police station and looked for the inspector. Pete saw Miss Harding, who luckily knew where the inspector was. The detectives pulled him aside immediately. Cotta rushed up to the second floor. On the way there he called in a sergeant in charge of the weapons room.

With his security key, the policeman opened the heavy door a few seconds later. He entered the room to get a first overview. Cotta went in next. The Three Investigators had to wait and walk restlessly up and down the corridor.

“Okay, come in,” Cotta finally shouted. Curiously Jupiter, Pete and Bob entered the weapons room.

The first thing they noticed was the window. One of the wings flapped in the wind. The glass had been smashed. On the right wall beside the inward-opening window, there were splinters of glass. Jupiter closed the door behind him and thus interrupted the draught.

“He climbed down, smashed the window, reached through with his hand and opened the window from the inside, which unfortunately is not sufficiently secured on the second floor.” Cotta analyzed the situation as if he were speaking into a dictation machine. “Weapon cabinet broken into.” Carefully he approached the cabinet and with a ballpoint pen pushed open the door, with the broken lock hanging loosely. “And this,” said Cotta.

Jupiter approached nearer to the cabinet. There were rifles hung in a row. Jupiter counted five. “Special rifles?” he asked.

The inspector nodded thoughtfully. “We rarely use them. Mostly for practice.” He made a significant pause. “They are for snipers,” he added.

“There’s one missing, sir,” said the sergeant.

“I see that too,” mumbled Cotta.

Jupiter cleared his throat. “Then the burglar once again took only the bare necessities.”

“Or he was interrupted by you, Jupiter.” Cotta went to the window and opened it fully, avoiding touching the handle with his hand. “I’d be very surprised if this isn’t the rope from the sports shop,” Cotta said. He leaned out and looked up at the façade. “He tricked us again.”

“We were close,” said Jupiter.

“Yes.” Cotta closed the window. “You almost had him. By the way, the allegedly kidnapped boy is back. Earlier we got the message that he had just run away.”

“That figures.” Jupiter could not help smiling proudly. “The culprit simply jumped at this information. He used it as bait.”

Then Bob suddenly cried out. “Look,” he shouted and pointed to the corner behind the door where something was lying on the floor.

“The president mask,” Pete stammered. “His trademark.”

Now there was no doubt that the two thefts were committed by the same person. Cotta instructed them to leave everything untouched and led them out again. He had the door locked and they went back to the conference room.

The inspector sent the sergeant to search for Fred and Fritz, who must still be outside. Then he went looking for Miss Harding and Scott Ambler. When he returned with them a few minutes later, he turned off the music. The party was over. The inspector asked everyone to wait in the conference room and began to question every policeman and guest in an adjoining room. The psychologists took part in the interview.

Jupiter was also asked to go to the adjoining room, followed by Pete and Bob. Afterwards Cotta released them to go home.

Outside in the darkness, there was a light rain. They were glad that they had come in Bob's car and not by bicycles. They ran to the parking lot.

When Bob pulled his car keys out of his pocket, he discovered something under the windshield wiper. "What?" he exclaimed. "A ticket?" He grabbed the paper and he froze.

"Well? Driver's licence revoked?" joked Pete.

Bob shook his head and held the soaked paper out to his friends. It was a pamphlet inviting people to the presidential election rally.

"Bummer," muttered Jupe, immediately checking the cars in the area. But no other car had the leaflet. "Wolf Face greets The Three Investigators," he said soundlessly.

"Come on, unlock the door, I'm getting wet," Pete snapped.

Bob unlocked the door of the car. "Get in!" he shouted and looked around. Then he got behind the wheel. "I'll drive you home and put you to bed."

"Okay." Pete threw himself in the back seat and Jupiter took the passenger seat.

Bob started the car. "Is Wolf Face targeting us with the leaflet?" he opened the discussion. "That would mean he knows we're following him."

Jupiter was silent and ordered his wet hair.

Pete blurted out: "Someone put it under your wiper because you have such a nice old Beetle," he said. But he didn't believe it himself.

"He's smart," Bob said.

"You can say that again," Pete picked up the thread. "Wolf Face has struck twice already. The second act was announced in the first—by stealing the climbing gear. Because, as Jupe said, he could have just bought the rope. But he did not. Logical conclusion—the third act should now result from the second one!"

"But then it would be very dangerous," Bob speculated. "Because this time he has taken a high-powered rifle." He stopped the car because a light turned red in front of him.

"He's got a lot of nerve stealing it from a police station." Bob checked his rear-view mirror. There weren't many cars on the road any more.

"Green," Jupiter said. "Bob, the light is green again!"

Bob stepped on the accelerator. "Have you nothing to contribute to our deliberations today, Jupe?"

"Yes, I do." Jupiter took his hands out of his hair and wiped them on his pants. "I keep thinking about how he knew about the police party. Or where the weapons are kept. He must have inside information."

"You think he might be a cop too?" Pete reported from the back seat.

"Yes, or he knows one. Or one of the other guests..." Jupe said.

"For example, the mayor," Pete explained.

"Maybe," said Jupiter. "Or maybe the mayor's staff members who arrange his appointments. We should go over the guest list with Cotta tomorrow."

Bob stopped at an intersection. He looked in the rear-view mirror again. He hadn't noticed any particular car following them. "I thought Cotta said we're off the case?" he said.

"But at least we almost caught the culprit," Jupiter said proudly. "Or I did. You two were busy reading newspaper articles."

"Oh, yeah." Bob took a turn and then stopped. "Here we are, Jupe. Salvage yard station. Out you go."

"Why are you turning off the engine?" Jupiter asked. "I thought you're driving Pete home?"

Bob opened the driver's door, got out and folded the seat forward for Pete. "I have to check on something at Headquarters. I have an idea."

8. Bob Scores a Hit

Pete immediately dropped into an armchair while Jupiter was leaning against the edge of the computer table. His stomach asked for fluids, but otherwise he felt completely fine. The First Investigator was relieved that the suspicion of poison had not been confirmed. He grabbed a Coke and watched Bob with moderate interest.

From the cabinet, Bob took out several file folders and piled them up in front of him.

"I am in charge of research and records," he explained. "Every once in a while I have to get this into your thick heads."

"You mean because I've been relieving you of a lot of work lately since the Internet came into existence?" Jupiter asked.

"Exactly. You're interfering with my authority." Bob leafed through the first folder.

Jupiter looked at the newspaper articles that had been stuck on, already slightly yellowed. "What is this all about, Bob," he asked.

Bob didn't answer and turned the page. Shortly afterwards he had reached the second folder.

"At least the Internet has search engines." Pete slid deeper into the armchair. Tired, he closed his eyes. "There you type in a keyword and find pages or articles. Bob's paper records are difficult to organize."

"If you keep bleating like this, I'm going to take my annual vacation and you can search through all this to get to Wolf Face," Bob explained. "And besides, the Internet's no good if you don't know the keyword."

Jupiter picked up one of the folders and looked at the cover: 'Famous Cases in Criminal History, Volume III'.

"Your, as you must admit, somewhat silly remark in the car gave me the idea," Bob said as he took the third folder from Jupiter.

"That you were reading newspaper articles while I almost caught the culprit?" Jupiter asked.

"Right." Suddenly Bob stopped. He opened the folder and took out a sheet of paper. "That's what I was looking for," he said proudly. "I knew I had that story in my collection. The only thing I had forgotten was the year."

Jupiter leaned over him, and Pete had jumped up too. Bob held in his hands an article he had copied from a New York newspaper almost five years ago. This was indicated by the date of the article. One photo showed a man who had just been led out of the courtroom. 'Seven years for the Wolf Face'—the headline announced in big letters.

"Go ahead, read it," Pete said excitedly. He could not see anything because Jupiter had pushed himself in front of him.

New York: Jeff Rodder, who had caused a stir among the New York police in recent months, has now been sentenced to seven years in prison for robbery and burglary. In letters that sounded like fairy tales, Rodder had indirectly announced his actions to the police, but had led the police astray each time. He was only caught because chance

helped. During a brazen climbing action on the wall of a bank, Rodder fell and broke his leg. He was wearing a wolf mask when he was arrested.

Rodder used to be a police officer himself. During the trial, an expert explained that Rodder claimed to have been wrongly dismissed from duty. His actions were not only for his own enrichment, but also for deliberately misleading the police. But now the cat-and-mouse game with the police is over.

Rodder, who was called 'Wolf Face' by the press because of the mask, silently accepted the verdict.

Bob looked up. "Well?"

"Wow," Jupe said appreciatively. "That figures. Wrong tracks, climbing actions and mask. Wolf Face could be Jeff Rodder."

"But it couldn't have been Rodder," cried Pete. The Second Investigator now had the copy of the article in his hand and looked at the photo. "If he was convicted five years ago and got seven years, he's still in prison."

"Unless he was released early," Bob replied excitedly.

"Okay." Jupiter jumped to the computer and started it. "Now it's my turn." He accessed the Internet and started searching.

"Takes at least as long as mine," Bob grinned as he looked over his friend's shoulder. "My good old collection system is not so bad."

With a shrug, he took a few steps back and stumbled over the Coke crate. He pushed it under the table. "By the way, Pete, we're going out of Coke again."

"No kidding." Pete pulled a bottle out of the crate and played with it. Then he stood up and put it on the little board that Jupiter had put up at the front door. "Our new lucky charm," he said. "Empty bottle."

"Really iconic," Bob remarked, not very enthusiastically. "So which one of the three of us does it represent?" He grinned at Pete and then turned to Jupiter. "Still nothing?"

Jupiter struggled with the mouse. "I have to get rid of these stupid ads first," he muttered. "Why do they always come first?"

He continued clicking and searching and finally, after a few minutes, he found what he was looking for.

"There, I've got it!" It was a small newspaper article, about two months old. "New York," Jupiter read. "Jeff Rodder, known as Wolf Face, was paroled yesterday for good behaviour. Rodder had caused quite a stir in New York several years ago with crimes announced in fairy tales."

Jupiter scrolled down the page but the information was basically a summary of the report five years ago. "That's all it says," he said. "But it confirms that he is out of prison." He took a sip from his bottle and accessed the California Phone Directory on the Internet. He entered the name Jeff Rodder. But he couldn't find anything.

"Two months," Bob remarked. "Would you have expected him to live here under his real name?"

"I know," said Jupiter. "But I had to try."

He picked up the newspaper clipping, stood up and wanted to put it in his pocket.

"Show me that picture again," Pete asked. Jupiter gave him the article and Pete looked at the photo carefully. "What's that on his chin?" he asked.

Bob had also bent over the article. "It looks like a scar. That's probably why he always wore a mask."

Pete gave him back the article. "So what do we do now?" he asked.

"Now I'll make you a photocopy," Jupiter said dryly.

"Thank you, Jupe. But actually, I wanted to know how we were going to proceed."

Jupiter laughed. "Let's sleep on it for now," he suggested. "It's late. Tomorrow we'll meet and decide what to do."

"I can only come in the morning," Bob said. "In the afternoon, I have to pick up my cousin at the airport."

Pete looked up. "Oh no! Mary from Seattle? That little chatterbox? Then please tell her that Jupe and I have left. Her talking would be too much for my ears."

"Besides, I'm sure she'll want to rummage around in our yard again from morning till night," Jupiter agreed. "With that prospect every white lie you can tell is okay with me."

"It's not gonna be that bad," Bob said. "Well, she's a year older now, and I guess she's got a boyfriend now too."

"Well, maybe she won't chase you anymore, Bob!" Pete was punching his arm in a friendly manner. "She always stuck to you like a leech. Perhaps there are not too many nice boys in Seattle."

"She lives in a small town near Seattle," Bob corrected.

"It's definitely pretty close to Canada," Jupiter interjected. "There are loggers running around there."

Bob grinned at the Californian arrogance displayed by Jupiter. "Best you tell her yourself."

"No thanks," Jupiter concluded the discussion. "So, tomorrow at half past ten? I'll have plans before then."

"And what, may I ask? Privately or professionally?" Pete looked at him curiously.

"Well," Jupiter growled and accompanied his friends to the door, "one doesn't exclude the other."

Jupiter got up earlier than usual. He went to the bathroom and even washed his hair—a little more carefully than usual. Then he chose what he wanted to wear for the day, before going down for breakfast.

Uncle Titus, who was already working in the yard, had left the morning paper on the table for him. Jupiter leafed through it. There was still nothing in it about the brazen theft at the police station. Presumably Cotta had withheld the news.

After breakfast, he put the dishes in the kitchen, for which he caught a surprised look from Aunt Mathilda. "How was the cake last night?" she asked.

"It was so good, I couldn't eat another bite. People came down on it like locusts. Not a crumb was left." He looked at her trustingly.

Contentedly she smiled to herself. Then she asked, "Jupe, can you help me with the ironing?" When she saw the look on his face, she added: "You're on holiday and I have to leave right away."

"You have to leave right away?"

"Yes," she said casually, "for weight training."

"Weight training?" cried Jupiter in surprise. "You do fitness training? What did Uncle Titus say?"

"Oh, uh, I don't think he knows yet."

"Well, he'll be surprised," said Jupiter. "I have plans now. Can I do the ironing later?"

"Oh, that's why you're all dressed up." She measured him with her eyes.

“Nothing gets past you.” Jupiter rinsed the last cup and Aunt Mathilda threw him a fresh towel.

“All right,” she relented and said, “go away.”

He laughed at her and was glad that she had not asked any further questions. “Enjoy your workout,” he said, hanging up the towel. “Maybe you’ll be able to lift me up soon!”

“I can’t practice that much,” she quipped.

The First Investigator smiled, swung the door open and went outside.

“Oh, Jupe!” cried Aunt Mathilda after him, “Have you actually...”

But Jupiter had already slammed the door behind him.

9. Airtight Alibis

The First Investigator disappeared into Headquarters and retrieved the article that Bob had discovered yesterday. He took another look at it. The copy didn't make the newspaper photo any clearer, but Rodder was clearly visible. Then he swung onto the saddle of his bike and pedalled. The cool morning wind blew through his hair and that's what finally woke him up.

A few minutes later, he turned into Kennedy Street. It wasn't far to Outdoor World. The window smashed by Wolf Face had already been replaced.

The First Investigator was lucky. Sandy Allen had just unlocked the shop door.

"Hi, Jupiter! Nice of you to come."

"Hi, Sandy. Can I come in now?"

"Sure." She pushed the door and entered the store. "Well, did you find who did it?"

"Well, it can't be that fast," he replied. "Do you have to open the store by yourself in the morning?"

"No, Mr Stapleton is usually in his office by now." Sandy threw her jacket over a shelf and walked over to a pile of slippers. "Will you help me? I need you to step over there to help me set up a display."

"Sure." Jupiter grabbed an armful. Sandy hooked the door tight so it was open, and together they set up the merchandise.

"Thank you," Sandy said, when everything was decorated. She stopped at the door. "Were you just visiting, Jupiter, or do you have another detective question for me?"

She turned her hair and looked at him. He liked the fact that she seemed to prefer a 'yes' to the first part of her question than the second.

"Both," he replied, looking up at the sky. Just then the sun flashed through the clouds and fell on Sandy's face. "Maybe even the former," he said in a joking tone.

He pulled the newspaper article out of his jacket and showed it to Sandy. "Look at the photo. Does it look familiar to you?"

Sandy picked up the clipping, skimmed the headline, then focused on the photo. "There are several people here. You mean the man in the foreground?" She looked more closely and kept talking.

"Yes, yes, I think I've seen the one in front with the scar. It's just a photocopy and the photo is old... The bald head, the eyes and especially the scar, that must have been him!" She handed the article back to him.

"Was he here?" Jupiter asked excitedly.

Sandy nodded. "Yes, sometime in the last few days. He came in and looked around."

"Did he want to know anything?"

"No. He didn't say anything. I just noticed that he..." She faltered.

"... that he was particularly interested in what was at the shop window," Jupiter finished.

"Right," she said. "I thought he wanted to take another look at the display. Later, he spoke to Mr Stapleton. I overheard it by chance. About..." Again she paused. "About the binoculars," she went on. "He said he lived down at the old houses at the cliffs and wanted to watch birds."

“Gee, Sandy,” Jupiter said. “That must have been him. We’re going to…” That’s as far as he got, because suddenly Mr Stapleton appeared behind them.

“Miss Allen,” he said, “would you mind unpacking the new diving equipment?” He coughs. With irony, he continued, “And if you can, before we close tonight.”

It was only now that he recognized Jupiter. “Oh, it’s you! I’m sorry, Mr, uh, Jones, I think, but Sandy is not paid to stand around.”

Sandy rolled his eyes and spun around. “I’m coming, Mr Stapleton,” she said, not showing her annoyance at the sudden disturbance.

“I’ll call you,” Jupiter promised. “Perhaps the weather will get better!” She nodded and winked at him.

Jupiter arrived back at Headquarters in time at half past ten. Pete and Bob were already waiting for him, so he could let them have the hot news right away. They had really hit the mark with Rodder.

After a short and heated dispute, they decided to tell Inspector Cotta of their suspicions. Jupiter would have liked to examine Rodder himself, but since the event the night before, Pete and Bob thought that that man was too dangerous. Especially since he was now presumably equipped with a deadly weapon.

Disgruntled, Jupiter turned on the loudspeaker and dialled Cotta’s number. The inspector picked up the phone after the third ring.

“Inspector Cotta? ... Jupiter Jones here. Sir, we can probably give you some information on Wolf Face,” said the First Investigator. “But only if you keep us informed of any further developments.”

Cotta did not agree to the arrangement and Jupiter saw the chance to revert to his idea of not informing the inspector of their suspicions. He started to end the conversation. “All right, Inspector, then we’ll have to do it ourselves.”

“Okay boys,” Cotta replied. “You’re really stubborn. I’ll let you know what happens next. I promise. If you start on your own, you’ll only get into trouble with a guy like that. So let’s have it out!”

Jupiter told what they had discovered. Cotta was impressed. “That sounds good,” he said. “If he really came here from New York... We’ll put an APB out on Rodder right away.”

Jupiter hung up. “Well, that was it,” he said sullenly. “At least we are the ones who gave him the decisive tip and not Miss Police Psychologist Harding.”

He dragged himself to a chair. He didn’t like the idea that this promising case would be over so quickly. At least, they will still have a few more days of the holidays. Well, he could still go diving. Bob said goodbye and went home.

Pete wanted to keep Jupiter company and since they had nothing to do and the day was ruined for Jupiter anyway, so they decided to help Aunt Mathilda with the ironing. Pleased and extremely surprised, she accepted the offer. For this they were rewarded with an extensive lunch.

After that, the two of them hung around for a while at the salvage yard. Jupiter had suggested to look for a new lucky charm for Headquarters. As expected, the First Investigator had not been enthusiastic about the empty Coke bottle. Just as they were looking at three small dinosaurs, they heard the telephone ring at Headquarters.

“The phone’s ringing!” cried Jupiter and trotted off. He stumbled into the trailer and picked up the phone.

“Inspector Cotta!” he shouted in surprise. The First Investigator immediately switched on the loudspeaker so that Pete could listen in. “What’s new, Inspector? Do you have Rodder?”

“Well, Jupiter, we have indeed located him. He’s recently moved into one of the old houses at the cliffs—alone.”

From Cotta’s voice, Jupiter expected that a ‘but’ would follow. “Haven’t you met him, Inspector?”

“Yes, indeed. Rodder hangs around at home most of the time since he is still without work. But he’s trying to get a job. A temp agency confirmed it.”

Nervously, Jupiter played with the phone cord. “So? What’s the problem?”

“Well, he gave alibis for both times of the crime. We checked them out. They’re airtight.”

Jupiter and Pete exchanged a surprised look. “Totally airtight?”

“Yes, absolutely. He’s not responsible for the thefts. We now suspect the perpetrator is a copycat.”

“A copycat?”

“Yes, a man who knows Rodder’s past. Who, like you, may have read about it in the papers and followed the story. Rodder himself seems to be making a real effort to lead a normal life.”

“Why did he come to Rocky Beach from New York?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“He wanted to start a new life, so he moved from the East Coast to the West Coast. I think it was a clean break from his past.”

Jupiter was speechless. Unwillingly, his free hand pinched his lower lip. But Pete interrupted the all too familiar movement by pulling him by the sleeve. “Ask him more precisely about the alibis,” he whispered to the First Investigator.

Jupiter nodded. “The alibis, Inspector, can you tell me what Rodder was doing at the time of the thefts?”

Cotta coughed! “Jupiter, this is really going too far. Sorry, no.”

“But, Inspector,” Jupiter urged, “that was the deal. You should be informing us about everything! It’s only fair!”

“All right.” He breathed audibly. “When Outdoor World was broken into, Rodder was up in Hilltown at a ranch taking riding lessons. The riding instructor and other employees positively identified him. Last night, he ate pizza at Romana’s. Several people remembered him. He was there the whole evening. Happy?”

“Yes, thank you, sir.” Jupiter exchanged a meaningful look with Pete. “But then everything starts all over again.”

Cotta laughed bitterly. “Yes, unfortunately. It would have been too good to be true. But the dangerous madman is still at large. And, friends,” the inspector reinforced his warning with an artificial pause, “keep a low profile. This is way out of your league!”

Jupiter did not respond to Cotta’s last remark. “Maybe he even deliberately laid the parallel to Rodder as a trap,” he said instead. “So that the police would focus on the wrong person.”

“That’s exactly what Miss Harding believes.”

“There was no need to point that out now, Inspector.”

Cotta laughed. “In some way, you two are quite similar. Bye bye.” He hung up.

After the surprising news from Cotta, Jupiter called Bob to come for a meeting at Headquarters. He had just returned from the airport with Mary and gratefully accepted the summons. Giving a bland apology to his mother, he promised to be back by nine o’clock in the evening at the latest. Then he swung himself onto his bicycle.

When Bob arrived, Jupiter and Pete were already deeply involved in discussions. The First Investigator vigorously defended his new theory that the police psychologist, Miss Harding, was heavily involved in the case. He suggested that she be investigated further.

Pete thought it was absurd. "Just because you do not like her, now she belongs in the list of suspects," he stated annoyingly.

Jupiter leaned at the computer table, as so often. His hands were stuck in his jeans pockets. "Yes, Pete!" he shouted. "Think of the theft at the police party. The climber had good information. He knew all about the party and the location. He knew about the food buffet and the room where the weapons were kept. For sure Miss Harding knew all this."

"You and a hundred others!" Pete had leaned forward in his armchair. "You said yourself that almost any guest could do this—up to and including the mayor." He interrupted himself and looked up because Bob had been standing there in silence for quite a while.

"Hi, Bob..." Pete kept on talking. "I have a completely different theory. Rodder is in on this."

"Really?" Jupiter asked. "Does he perhaps have a double? Or can he be in two places at once?"

"Don't be so ironic," Pete replied surprisingly calmly. "Please listen to me. Uh, sit down, Bob. Have a Coke. You're making me nervous standing here. So here's the deal—Rodder was released from prison. He came to Rocky Beach. Supposedly, he's looking for work. He spends most of his time at home, alone, nobody sees him. But, of all people..." Here Pete took a break and looked at Jupiter and Bob. "... at the very moment of the thefts, Jeff Rodder had two airtight alibis! What a strange coincidence!"

"There's something to it," muttered Bob, who slowly realized what it was all about. "Rodder could have an accomplice." Even Jupiter had to agree with him, although very reluctantly.

"Watch out," Pete suggested. "We'll go to the Romana's Pizzeria tonight and check out Rodder's alibi."

"You can do that alone," said Jupiter. "If Cotta has already done so, it is true. You can rely on Cotta."

"Nevertheless," Pete was adamant. "I want to hear it with my own ears."

"Stubborn guy!" Jupiter remarked.

"And the other alibi?" Bob asked. "Did Rodder also go out for pizza?"

Pete laughed. "The day before yesterday, he supposedly took riding lessons at the Hilltown Horse Ranch. He's taking the mickey out of us."

"I'll take the pizzeria," Bob said. "I can get there pretty good on my bike."

Pete nodded. "Okay, I'm gonna get in my MG and go up to the ranch."

Jupiter nodded resignedly. "Do what to convince yourselves. I bet that you'll only get confirmation that Rodder's alibis check out." He hadn't moved an inch from the computer desk.

"I almost believe our First Investigator has other plans for tonight," Bob said and winked at Pete. "... Judging from the way he resists our proposal." Jupiter was silent.

Pete smiled. "I think Jupiter is going somewhere else today," he said smugly. "So says my mental model."

10. Verifying the Alibis

When Bob arrived at the Romana's Pizzeria, only a few guests were sitting at the tastefully set tables. It was a rather sophisticated restaurant, which they usually did not visit. Bob looked down on his old jeans.

A young dark-haired waiter had spotted him and approached him, looking at Bob somewhat disparagingly.

"Good evening. What can I do for you?" the waiter greeted him.

"Good evening, sir," Bob said politely. "I have an appointment with a friend." He looked around. "Mr Rodder. About mid-thirties, bald, oh, yes, scar on his chin."

The waiter's face darkened. "Oh, you are with that guy?" His voice suddenly sounded anything but friendly. "Well, I might as well call the police, they've been asking about him too!"

"I don't understand," Bob said.

The waiter pulled him toward the exit. "Well, I'll give you a hint. Your dear Mr Rodder spent all evening here last night grumbling. I was about to throw him out, run-down the way he was. But he made such a fuss, I left him sitting in the back corner. A damned mistake!"

"How long was he there?"

"Way too long." Hastily, the waiter sent Bob outside. "All night long. He drank nothing but water for hours, occupying a table to himself. And then he tried to skip out on the bill." He pushed Bob out onto the sidewalk a little more. "Now, get out of here!" He turned around and went back to the restaurant.

It just started raining. Well, that was short and heavy, Bob thought. But one thing is clear—Rodder could not be the climber from the police station.

He got onto his bike and headed for Headquarters. Meanwhile, rain was pouring down heavily. Had Pete had found out more?

Meanwhile, Pete had driven through the hilly terrain of Hilltown and had found the vast grounds of the riding stable without any problems. He parked his MG at one of the few free parking lots in front of the horse ranch.

He got out and took in the fresh evening air. A few horses snorted. Actually he could go riding again, he thought while looking around. He was fascinated by the atmosphere of the riding stables, where there was always something adventurous about it.

Pete crossed the forecourt and entered the main building. Since no one was behind the old reception desk, he was guided by the sign 'Rider's Room' to a small restaurant.

There was a lot going on in there. All seats were taken. People were drinking, eating, talking. One group was talking about the best saddle, another was about the best horse. Many of the guests were still sitting there in their riding outfits. It took Pete a moment to find his way around. He saw a man behind the bar and made his way to him.

"Good evening." At that volume, he almost had to shout. "Just a Coke, please!"

"Right away."

He waited until the host handed him the glass. "Sorry, one question." The man nodded and bent over the counter. "A friend, Mr Rodder, recommended that I take riding lessons

here. He was here two days ago in the afternoon. I'm interested in western riding."

"Hold on." The man went into a back room and came back shortly afterwards with a thick appointment book. "Two days ago, you say a Mr Rodder..." His finger ran down several lines. "Yes, here, from 4 to 6, it was with Ellie. Ellie Ring, she's here tonight, at the back of the riding school. Go and ask her."

"Thank you." With a strong sip, Pete emptied the glass, paid and left the restaurant.

It wasn't hard to spot Ellie. She could only be that petite brown-haired person who was just struggling to teach a fat man how to lift a heavy western saddle onto a horse. The only thing that was perfect was his clothes, and brand-new too. When he had watched for a while, Ellie looked up. "Do you want to see me?"

"Yes, but it can wait."

She said something to her student, then she left him alone with his fate and came to Pete who was waiting behind the barrier. "Well, what's up?"

"Good evening, Miss Ring." He put on an awkward smile. "He didn't say you were so good-looking."

She looked at him suspiciously. "Who said what?"

"Mr Rodder. A friend of mine. He took riding lessons from you two days ago."

"You're a friend of Mr Rodder's?" She seemed genuinely surprised. "That's what the police were asking about earlier."

Pete hesitated and changed his tactics. "Well, let's say an acquaintance. He was so excited about your lessons."

She laughed and her hair fell back in her face. "Did he really? He kept falling off his horse."

"Well, Mr Rodder is still practising." Pete wondered how old Ellie was. He decided that she was in her mid-twenties.

"Practice is still good! He's not a fool, I must say. I've never seen someone like him." With a side glance, Ellie checked what the fat man was doing. The saddle had just slipped out of his hands. The horse began to get nervous.

"Easy, Uno," she shouted over. She shook her head in annoyance. "This one doesn't do much better," she said.

Pete nodded conspiratorially at her. "Well, Mr Rodder hasn't ridden much," he cautiously resumed the subject.

"Not to say not at all." She stroked her hair behind her ear, which made her face a little sterner. "Indeed..." she said.

"Indeed what?"

Ellie hesitated. "Now that you mention it, though he claimed he'd never ridden before... but there were times when I felt he'd been on a horse before—like he was trying to look like a beginner."

"Perhaps he liked being guided by you," Pete replied as charmingly as possible.

"I see." She didn't elaborate. "And you, you want to get into riding?"

"I think so," Pete said. "Western riding is a dream of mine. But I hope I can do a little better."

"Well, let's see."

They were interrupted by a dull thud. The man's saddle had slipped off his horse.

"It's getting to be cruel to animals," Ellie whispered. "OK, sign up at the front if you want to ride with me." She nodded at him.

"It shouldn't fail with me!"

Thoughtfully Pete went back to the car. At the reception, he was almost tempted to actually register with Ellie Ring for riding lessons. But the reception desk was still unmanned. Since it was starting to rain, Pete jogged to his MG.

With a sigh he let himself fall into the driver's seat. He was glad that he had checked the alibi himself.

"Rodder was extremely lazy," he murmured and turned the ignition key.

Almost simultaneously, Pete and Bob arrived in front of Headquarters. Jupe was not there, so they guessed that he was at his house. Bob went over to the house and rang the bell at the front door. Aunt Mathilda opened the door.

"I thought he was with you," she said in surprise. She also told Bob that she noticed that Jupiter had dressed up a little better than usual.

When Bob entered the trailer, Pete was just about to put the three dinosaur figures he had found on the board next to the front door. "Our new lucky charms," he explained.

Bob picked up a figure. "Great. It fits. They're plastic. They can withstand any mouse pad attack." He dropped the dino on the floor. The rubber animal jumped up and down a couple of times and then somehow stopped upright.

"Wromm! Test passed. Indestructible!" He put it back on the board. "What shall we call them?"

"Maybe the mythical three!" Pete suggested. "Or The Three Invincibles!" Pete laughed. "Then Jupiter, Pete and Bob!"

"Agreed!" Bob said. "But the other way around, the biggest one's named Bob."

"Well, I wonder if our leader would appreciate it," Pete wondered.

"He's not here. And he who is late..." Bob sneezed. "The rain!" he said. "Hand me that towel." Pete threw it to him.

"You want me to rub my head with this old thing?" Bob asked. "It's been sitting here for months!"

"Better than being in bed tomorrow."

Bob did his hair and a few drops splashed across the room.

"You look like a punk," Pete commented.

Bob shook his head so that the hair stood even more in all directions. "Come on," he said, "let's talk quickly, I promised to be home at nine today—to put Mary to bed."

"Then we don't have much time left." Pete was disappointed. "Actually, I was gonna suggest we pay Rodder another visit tonight."

Bob looked at him in amazement. "But why? It couldn't have been him. At least the pizza alibi checks out." Pete nodded. "The riding one, too. But this thing stinks." He told Bob what the riding instructor had told him.

"Rodder has made it a point to make sure she doesn't forget him," he concluded. "He deliberately acted like a fool. She'll think about that guy for years to come. How was it with you?"

"Actually, the same way," Bob replied thoughtfully. "Rodder spent the entire evening at Romana's. But not as a good guest. He made such a fuss that the waiter and certainly some guests will not forget him. He doesn't seem to have been there before."

"You see," Pete triumphed. "Of all the times to commit a crime, he gets himself irrefutable alibis. Even though he can't be the face of the wolf, he must know about the two cases."

“And you want to go see him?” Bob looked at him doubtfully. “Otherwise, you’d better be careful.” Suddenly he laughed. “Oh wait! So that’s it! Jupe’s picking on Miss Harding and you’re holding Rodder against him, is that it?”

“Nonsense,” said Pete, waving his hand away. But Bob sensed that he wasn’t entirely wrong. He looked through the window. The rain had let up a little.

“I’ll have to go now,” Bob said. “I’ll see you tomorrow. And, Pete, I think we should ask Jupe before we do anything!”

“Yes, yes,” Pete murmured.

11. In the Wolf's Den

Pete parked his MG at the old wooden houses that were built at the cliffs. Because of the view out to the sea, they were once considered a preferred residential area, but then a film producer bought the whole settlement and let it go downhill over the years. Most people lived on rent here and quite often they had to protect their house from the incessant attacks of the west winds.

Under the cover of dusk, Pete moved carefully from house to house. Actually, he had suspected that he would have a hard time finding Rodder. But just as he had appeared under his real name at the restaurant and at the riding school, he had visibly identified himself —‘Jeff Rodder’ stood in freshly-brushed letters on a sign.

The outline of the house was dark against the evening sky. It stood almost twenty metres away in the middle of a garden overgrown with bushes and grass. Secretly Pete had hoped that Rodder would not be there, but a window in the basement was lit. Pete looked around. The two neighbouring houses stood a good distance away.

From the sea, a rain cloud was approaching again. The Second Investigator pulled the clips on his jacket tighter. Then he walked along the property until he found a suitable spot. He jumped over the wooden fence and hid behind a small tree. It had almost become night. Still he didn't want to take any risks.

Pete scurried from bush to bush, from cover to cover. Slowly he came closer to the house. His tension rose. He didn't know exactly what he was about to do. But he was sure that he would find something to convince Jupiter and Bob that Rodder was involved in the two incidents.

When he was perhaps ten metres away and stopped for a moment, he suddenly heard a rustling sound. It came from the bushes right next to him. Pete remained motionless until the sound died down. He waited a moment longer, counting to thirty. Then he groped his way further.

A scream cut through the monotonous roar of the wind. A dark shadow rose, something fluttered above his head. Pete pulled up his arms for protection. Then he breathed out relaxed. He had frightened a large sea bird.

He closed his eyes to concentrate again. It wasn't a movie he was in, it was the here and now. And he didn't tell anyone where he was. Pete pulled himself together and turned his attention to the house. The man inside didn't seem to notice the noise. For a moment, however, Pete thought that an even darker shadow had stood out in the window on the first floor.

But his perception was probably hypersensitive now. He waited a moment longer and saw that someone was moving in the brightly-lit room below. With the curtains drawn, Pete couldn't see anything clearly. Shortly afterwards, the light went out. A few seconds later, another window briefly lighted up. Then the outside lights flickered. Pete ducked deeper into the bush. He heard the front door open and then closed.

The outside light went out. Then a car door slammed shut. The engine started. Pete lay down deep in the grass so that the light from the car could not shine on him. When the car had gone, slowly, Pete straightened up. He knew exactly what he wanted to do.

Carefully he crept to the front door of the old wooden house. He could not quite deny a guilty conscience. He had no proof against Rodder and it remained an unauthorized intrusion. But his curiosity was stronger. He felt he was on a hot lead.

Pete groped his way to the door and listened for a sound, just in case. He heard nothing suspicious. His hands went into the inside pocket of his jacket to get out his lock picks. But his fingers reached into a void.

“Bummer!” Pete swore softly. He must have lost the case somewhere. He remembered that he had it with him. Pete got nervous. He had no idea how long Rodder would be gone. In any case, there was no time to lose. And he would have to get his lock pick case back. He’d probably lost it when he’d scared the bird. But would he find the bush again?

Irritated, Pete went into retreat. He tried to remember and retrace the path he went earlier. Over five minutes had passed before he was finally reasonably sure. It must have been here. The Second Investigator knelt on the ground and searched the grass with his hands. He left the flashlight off.

At first, he only grabbed stones and woods, then an empty can. But after two more minutes, he found what he was looking for. With a quiet whistle Pete pulled the rather wet case out from under a bush.

Visibly calmed, he stood up and looked around. Silently and dark, the house laid there. The rain had subsided, but the next cloud was already gathering in the sky. Pete thought for a moment whether he should call off the action, after all, the search his lock picks had cost him some time. But the chance was still good. And that he had found his case again, he interpreted it as a good sign. He put it in his pocket of his jacket and walked back towards the house.

When Pete pressed the handle of the front door a few moments later, he was startled—the door was unlocked! Rodder had not locked it at all! Probably that wasn’t necessary around here, he thought and pushed the door open a little further. He had to act fast now to make up for the lost time. Five minutes, Pete thought, that should be enough for the action. Otherwise, there was a risk that Rodder would come back.

Then he slipped into the dark dilapidated house. It smelled musty inside. Before Rodder moved in, the house must have stood empty for a long time. Pete pulled out his flashlight and turned it on. An old coat rack was the only item in the entrance room. Then he found himself in a kind of corridor, from which a staircase led up.

Pete opened a door and entered a living room. Compared to the corridor, this room was lavishly furnished. Illuminated by his flashlight, he could see an old armchair, a coffee table, closets, and also a small desk. Rodder seemed to spend most of his time here, even if it was not very comfortably furnished.

Everything had been put together carelessly—clothes had been carelessly thrown on the couch and copies of the *Los Angeles Times* covered the floor. Pete took a closer look at the newspaper headlines. Right underneath a big article about the president’s visit, he discovered the small report about the boy who disappeared in Los Angeles. But that didn’t have to mean anything.

In the middle of the living room table was an open can of beer. Pete picked it up, it hadn’t been drunk yet.

Rodder must have left very suddenly. Hopefully he didn’t come back just as suddenly, because the desk was inviting him to investigate, as Pete noted with pleasure. Several letters and papers that were lying on top of it were definitely worth a closer look. Pete groped his way forward. With every step he took, the wooden floor creaked, and he paused again and

again to hear if anything was happening outside. But apart from the raindrops, which were now drumming against the window pane, he didn't hear anything else.

The five minutes had already passed. Pete hastily searched one of the stacks of paper. A letter from a temp agency was among them. The company complained that Rodder hadn't taken a job that they had placed him in. Pete frowned and searched further, delving into note after note—an electricity bill, an advertisement for the riding ranch in Hilltown, but no threatening letter, no envelope with a 'Mr Cotta' written on it or any other similarly tell-tale document. But Pete noticed another letter—Rodder had rented an expensive motorboat at Rocky Beach Marina. That's odd. What was he doing with it? And where did he get the money?

Then Pete was startled by the soft creaking of the wooden floorboards in the corridor. Rodder had come back! Hastily he looked around. The room had no other exit. The sea chest over there? Too far. The steps were already just before the door. Quickly Pete jumped to the ceiling light and unscrewed the bulb so that it would not light up. Then he switched off his flashlight and waited in the darkness.

Trembling, but concentrated, the Second Investigator heard the door open with a creaking sound. Someone had entered and hummed a song softly. Pete held his breath. The futile click of the light switch was the sign. His flashlight flared up and he started to jump. But at the same moment, Pete froze.

He looked into a cruel wolf mask.

12. The Third Letter

In shock, the flashlight slipped from his hands, fell to the floor and rolled under the dresser. The song humming died away and a thin, sweetish coloured giggle sounded. The grey figure stepped up to a floor lamp and turned it on. Light flooded the room.

Words were formed from the sticky giggle. "Oh, a fine little burglar. Stay there, my friend." Rodder, it had to be Rodder, slowly approaching Pete, who hadn't moved in his fright. "Hush, my friend, or you'll get it bad." The man showed a knife.

"What are you doing here, my little friend?" He had now reached Pete. The knife shone in the light. "Turn around, sweetheart." Just a few turns and he had Pete's hands tied behind his back. "Do you want to snoop around a bit, like the police?"

Pete found his voice back. "Leave me alone," he shouted. "You'll regret it!"

"You will regret." The man giggled. "My burglar. My unusual burglar." With a surprising jolt, he carried Pete to a sofa and tied his legs.

"You'll have a lot to tell me..." But just as he was tightening the rope around Pete's legs, he stopped and looked up. Pete heard it too. A car must have stopped up the path. The car door slammed.

"Is someone here to fetch you?" hissed the man. The sweetness had gone from his voice.

"Of course I'm missed!" cried Pete desperately.

But the man deftly stuffed a cloth into his mouth and dragged him to the sea chest that stood next to the door. With a jerk, he opened it and shoved Pete inside. "Don't make a sound," he said. "Or you will meet the wolf."

He took the mask off his face. The Second Investigator could only take a quick look at Rodder's scar, then the lid closed and it got dark. The only light was through the narrow cracks. Trembling all over his body, Pete wondered if it would be enough to get some air in. He had let himself be duped like a fool.

And no one knew where he was. Muffled by the wood, Pete heard someone knocking hard at the door. Rodder went into the corridor and closed the living room door behind him. At first, he couldn't understand anything of the short conversation that followed. Then the voices became louder and Pete's pulse began to beat faster.

"No, Mr Ambler," exclaimed Rodder in annoyance. "I really don't want to let you in anymore. The police have already been here."

"But I still have a few questions for you, Mr Rodder!" That was really Scott Ambler's voice, Pete thought excitedly.

"Can't we settle this out here?" Rodder asked.

That was the chance! Pete had to get attention, somehow. He tried to kick as hard as possible against the wall of the box with his feet tied together. He didn't have much room to move, but he could swing a little. A muffled knocking sounded. Go on, Pete thought, full speed ahead.

"Do you have a visitor, Mr Rodder?" Ambler asked. "I hear a noise somewhere."

"It's just the washing machine," Rodder explained.

"Mr Rodder!" Ambler sounded outraged. "It's not a washing machine! Let me in now!"

"Sir, you're right," Rodder said a little quieter. "I was joking. In fact, I was about to call the police."

"The police? What is happening?"

"Well." Rodder took a short break. "You know, I surprised a burglar."

"A burglar?"

"Yes. A rather young one, in fact. You cops can have him. Come in."

Pete heard the front door close and steps came closer. Then the men were in the room.

The flap above him opened and Pete looked into two faces, one angry and one astonished. "That's the guy," said Rodder. "Arrest him."

"Pete!" Mr Ambler uttered with surprise.

"You know this boy?" Rodder asked.

"Oh, yes, he's investigating the matter we told you about." Mr Ambler began to undo Pete's shackles. "You've got him tied up pretty good," he said with a sidelong glance at Rodder.

"So he wouldn't run off on me, the little fruit," Rodder explained. "That's why I put him in the box."

"I understand," Ambler muttered, and pulled the scarf out of Pete's mouth. "Pete, is it true you broke in here?"

"Yes, that's true..." Pete got up and slowly climbed out of the box. Rodder was damn clever. But Pete was sure that Wolf Face had set a trap for him. Why else would he have returned on foot and put the mask on?

"The door was opened." Though it was difficult for him, Pete reached out to Mr Rodder. He decided that it was wiser to defuse the situation for the time being. "Mr Rodder, I'm sorry," Pete said in a contrite tone.

Mr Ambler approached Rodder. "I would suggest that you do not to press charges," he said. "The way you handled him, he could sue you for false imprisonment and assault."

"That doesn't scare me," said Rodder and grinned broadly.

"And then there's the fact that you wouldn't let me into your house right away," Ambler explained.

"A joke," Rodder replied. "Just a joke. I knew the boy was safely stored away."

"Mr Rodder, I'm sure Pete didn't mean to steal anything from you. And I warn you. We can make life pretty difficult for you!"

Rodder put his hands on his hips. "I'll think it over," he growled.

Ambler grabbed Pete by the arm and pulled him out of the room. "Let's go," he hissed at him.

"What about your important questions?" Rodder asked.

"Got plenty of time," replied the police psychologist. He pushed Pete through the front door.

"The best thing for all of you to do is not to show your faces around here anymore," Rodder shouted after them. Then he threw the door shut.

Ambler stepped out at such a pace that Pete didn't even follow along at first. Silently, they ran through the darkness. Pete knew what was about to happen—a long lecture about the dangers of such actions. But instead Ambler just said: "Pete, I'll spare you any comment. You know yourself that you made a mistake. You're damn lucky!"

"Sorry," Pete said a second time that night. "And thank you," he said. "For saving me."

"Never mind."

They walked on through the night. They were both silent. Mr Ambler whistled a song to himself and Pete ordered his thoughts. The rain-swept gusts of wind blew in his face and

unlike the way there, he enjoyed them.

“Did you get anything?” Ambler asked when they reached his car.

“Unfortunately no, he came back too soon.”

“Come on, get in.” Ambler clicked his car’s central locking system.

“My car is at the settlement,” Pete said as he got into Ambler’s car.

“Miss Harding is pursuing the theory that Wolf Face is a copycat, simply using Rodder’s past as a guide.” Ambler started the car. “I’m not so sure. And apparently, neither are you?” Pete nodded, but remained silent.

“Wolf Face’s third letter appeared tonight,” Ambler continued. “I wanted to check up on Rodder. I’m particularly concerned about this president mask.”

“The third letter has arrived?”

“Yes.”

In the meantime, they had driven to Pete’s MG. “That’s my car, Mr Ambler.” The police psychologist stopped just before Pete’s car. But Pete was still sitting there.

“What does it say?” he asked. “In the letter?”

Ambler looked at him. “Promise me that from now on you’ll stay out of this,” he said.

“I will certainly not do such nonsense like today again,” Pete explained carefully. Ambler seemed to think that was enough.

“Okay.” He reached into his jacket pocket.

“I have here an extra copy.” He handed Pete the note. “You can have it, but don’t get involved.”

Trembling, Pete opened the folded sheet.

13. The Song Lyrics

The evening before, Pete had already left a message on the answering machine for his two friends saying that they absolutely had to meet in the morning. There would be important news.

When he arrived at The Jones Salvage Yard the next morning, Jupe was just dragging a crate of Coke into Headquarters. Pete took one end of the crate and helped him to stow the supply of drinks.

“Have you come across a treasure chest of money?” Pete asked.

“A donation from me,” replied Jupiter lightly and when he saw Pete’s astonished face, he added, “Because I’m in a good mood, quite simply.”

Pete was far from satisfied with this explanation. “What’s the matter with you? It’s never happened before? And where were you last night?”

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. There was nothing to get out of him. “You caused quite a stir last night,” he said instead and sat down in an armchair.

Pete was surprised. How did Jupiter know that? On the answering machine he had not revealed anything about his adventure and the third letter. But he never got around to asking Jupiter.

Suddenly, they heard a loud voice outside the door of the trailer. The two looked at each other with astonishment. They knew this voice only too well.

Jupiter was the first to react. “Tunnel Two!” he shouted in panic to Pete. Tunnel Two was a secret passage consisted of a narrow, small tube that led from the floor of the trailer through to the workshop. It was one of the escape routes of The Three Investigators, who had already rendered them many useful services and perhaps even saved their lives.

“Quick!” Pete jumped up. Every second mattered. But when Jupiter lifted the opening to Tunnel Two, he saw a load of files inside, blocking the tunnel from entry. “The files! They’re still here!” Jupe exclaimed.

In recent times, Headquarters had run out of space for their paper files, folders, and documents containing records of their cases. As a quick measure, they had chucked them out of sight into the tunnel. Although Bob was in charge of the records, he was so involved in other more interesting things that he had no time to sort out the mess.

Jupe resignedly dropped into an armchair. “I’m afraid it’s too late,” he grumbled. “We should always keep the escape route clear! Bob really is an idiot!”

But by then the front door was already open.

“I’m not an idiot,” Bob said and stepped in. Right behind him, a girl pranced into the trailer. She was, as Pete knew, about a year younger than the detectives, had longer blonde hair, was dressed shrill, wore sunglasses despite the rain clouds, and was called Mary—Bob’s cousin and one who could really chewed your ear off.

“Bummer,” said Jupe, the lid in his hand. Bob grinned, he could vividly imagine what was going on with his two friends.

“Hello, Mary,” Pete said. “So nice of you to come by.”

“Oh, Pete!” cried Mary. “Hello, Jupiter! I wanted to see you two right away, but Bob suggested coming here in the afternoon. Well, you know him, he always wants me all to

himself..." At this point Bob grinned at his friends in a very meaningful way.

"... but I wanted to see you so much and look around the exciting junk shop again. Since Bob was gone so long yesterday, Bob's mother suggested coming now. Isn't that great? It is always so much fun with you three in Rocky Beach in contrast to my little town of Woodfield. Pete, Jupiter, are you even listening to me..."

Pete's and Jupiter's heads were splitting. Jupiter was only interested in finding out from Pete what he had experienced last night.

She rattled on: "... So not even in Seattle there is so much going on as in your city. Even so when the president is coming to inaugurate a retirement home. How exciting! By the time he decides to come to my place, the election is probably long gone, or some madman has killed him. Just imagine, tomorrow he'll be here! I saw on the streets, everything's in an uproar, barriers are being erected. I'd like to go there too. Come with me, of course, you're on holiday. Are your teachers as boring as in Seattle, I can't really imagine it, in California..."

"We must do something," Pete hissed to Jupiter, "we urgently need to talk about Wolf Face, and alone!"

"... whereas my last maths test went incredibly well. You know what? I just imagined I was Jupiter and how he would solve it..."

"I have an idea," muttered Jupiter softly, "Pete, wait."

"Well, he's always so logical, that's what I admire about him, and Pete, so athletic. Pete, do you still jog so much? I heard that jogging is not so healthy, the bones, my father, who is at the university..."

"Mary," Jupiter interrupted strictly. "You wanted to rummage through the junk shop?"

"Yes, of course, Jupiter, you have such exciting things here and..."

"I'll be right back," explained Jupiter and left the trailer with measured steps. Pete already thought he had gone away for good when he was back to Headquarters a short time later.

"Come, Mary," he interrupted her rant.

Mary followed him outside, where Uncle Titus was waiting for the visitor and gave her a glass of juice to welcome her. "Hello, Mary! So you want to inspect my salvage yard?" he asked.

"With pleasure, Uncle Titus, can I call you uncle like last year," she chattered away. Uncle Titus put an arm around her shoulder and led her unerringly away from the trailer.

Jupiter returned to Pete and Bob, who had been waiting in front of Headquarters.

Then Mary turned her head around once more. "Aren't you coming?" she shouted.

"Later," Jupiter yelled back. Then he suggested to his friends to hurry up and get on their bikes. "We're going to your place, Bob. We'll be safest there from her."

Bob agreed and shortly afterwards they started pedalling hard. But the ride was more complicated than expected. Safety barriers were set up in several places in the small town for the next day.

Finally, they arrived at the Andrews's house. Before Bob's mother could really see them, they had already left for Bob's room.

"Don't you think that was a bit mean to Uncle Titus?" Pete asked as he sat down next to Bob on his unmade bed.

"He likes to guide other people through his business," replied Jupiter. He had taken a more distinguished seat on a cushion. "And Uncle Titus talks at least as much as Mary. Almost every object has a story. In return, I have promised to help him fix old furniture for a week."

"I'll fix it for him, too." Pete smiled. "The main thing is to get rid of Mary." Bob also agreed.

"Well, can I hear what's new?" Bob looked at Jupiter out of habit.

"I don't know everything yet either," said Jupiter. "Pete had come just before you. But Cotta called this morning. He was furious and blamed me for not keeping our agreement. I didn't know what it was about. He was also angry with Ambler. Apparently, Ambler went to Rodder on his own. And he said you broke into Rodder's house, Pete?"

The Second Investigator nodded and told them what had happened the night before. Just as he was describing how Rodder and Ambler had opened the sea chest, Bob's mother called up from below, "Bob, telephone!"

"Wait a minute, don't say anything until I come back," Bob said and jumped up. "Probably Sax Sendler. I called him about the plastic bag Wolf Face had on him when he robbed Outdoor World."

"Okay," Pete noted.

Bob hurried out of the room and Pete went over to Bob's highly-valued collection of CDs. Since Bob worked from time to time at Sax Sendler's music agency, he was able to get hold of CDs to add to his collection. Also through his father, who worked at the newspaper, he occasionally received review copies. There must be thousands of CDs by now.

"About 3400," Jupiter explained. "I just extrapolated it."

Pete smiled and marvelled at Bob's collection, even though he wasn't that interested in music—compared to sports.

A short time later, Bob came back. He seemed excited. "It was Sendler," he blurted out. "At first he couldn't remember anything that stood out. Then he remembered that twice someone had called him to invite Peter Gabriel to a presidential election party. It's ridiculous because Gabriel is not even under contract with Sendler. Anyway, Peter Gabriel isn't known by that many people here."

"I don't know who that is either," Pete admitted.

"Peter Gabriel is an English musician," Bob replied. "He was the original lead singer of Genesis, who later went solo. Subsequently, he was involved in African music."

Pete would have liked to tell them about last night. After all, the climax of the whole thing should be letter number three, a copy of which was in his pocket. But Jupiter had jumped up and joined Bob. "Maybe there really is a connection between Wolf Face and the phone call," he said. "Wolf Face gives clue after clue, but plays so intelligently that he's always one step ahead. Maybe the plastic bag was a sign to check with Sendler."

"Okay," Pete decided not to wait anymore. "Before you crack your brains on that connection, I have one more thing to add to this mystery—and it's something really hot! I've got a copy of the third letter to Cotta!"

"Pete!" cried Jupiter. "Why are you showing it to us only now?"

Pete ignored that remark and read the letter out:

I'm close to the finish line, Cotta. And you've achieved nothing. Admit it, you're in the dark. I don't really hate you. I don't care what you do. So this is my last story to you:

Today is different. The man is lying on the bed. He thinks "I have been waiting for this," He gets up, goes through the room and gets his little black case. He calmly screws together his precision weapon. "Today I make the action," he thinks. He looks at the clock. "I've got my radio, I can hear what's going on."

The man goes to the roller blind and carefully scans the street with his binoculars. The streets are lined with camera crews. With the train four blocks away, the cheering has really begun. The man smiles. "It's a matter of time. It's a matter of will," he says and looks through the scope of his weapon. "I shoot into the light."

From Wolf Face

"That's all," Pete said.

"What?" Bob exclaimed and grabbed the copy of the letter from Pete. He read through it silently again.

Jupiter was still digging around in his brain's statistics department. But he couldn't find what he was looking for.

Bob pondered awhile and then shouted: "I think I've got the connection! I think I know how Peter Gabriel fits into all this!"

"What is it?" Pete asked.

"I'll have it in a minute," Bob said, "it's on the tip of my tongue. There's a song... Damn, the cues again, come on, help me," he muttered.

"Binoculars, precision weapon, climbing rope, president's mask..." said Jupiter.

"Lonely boy!" Bob shouted. "Remember that funny line from the second letter!"

"Of course," said Jupiter. "'Lonely boy hiding behind the front door.' What about it?"

"The lonely boy and many other lines from this third letter are from a song by Peter Gabriel!" Bob said. "It's been a while, but I must have some of his CDs here." He walked over to his CD shelf and began searching.

"Wolf Face plays with fire." Jupiter remarked. "But he probably has no idea that in Bob we have a music expert."

Bob had excitedly pulled out the lyric booklet from a CD and studied it.

"I've got it!" Bob shouted and dropped the CD with excitement. "They are lines from the song 'Family Snapshot'! Pay attention!"

Bob inserted the CD and pressed the start button. While the song was playing, Jupiter took the copy of the third letter and compared it with the lyrics in the booklet. And the more he heard, the more his hands shook. Bob had actually made the connection!

Finally after the song ended, Bob said: "Man! There are many lines from the song in the third letter!" He took an audible breath, got hold of a highlighter and began highlighting the lines in the letter that were from the song. All-in-all, he found twelve lines:

I don't really hate you.

I don't care what you do.

Today is different.

I have been waiting for this.

Today I make the action.

I've got my radio.

I can hear what's going on.

The streets are lined with camera crews.

The cheering has really begun.

It's a matter of time.

It's a matter of will.

I shoot into the light.

“Now everything is clear! Guys, I’m getting out,” he then said in a firm voice.

“You what?” Jupiter asked. “How did you come to that conclusion?”

“The song ‘Family Snapshot’ is based on a book written about an attempted assassination of a political leader,” Bob explained. “Look at the lyrics, that is what it describes! The song doesn’t specifically mention it, but it tells of an eternal loser, of a boy left alone, who toyed with the idea of catapulting himself back to life with this insane act.”

“When it comes to music, you lecture like Jupe,” Pete said in between.

“I’m getting out, Jupe,” Bob clarified. “Because this thing really is out of our league! It’s about nothing less than an assassination attempt on the president!”

Jupiter put his hands on his head. “Clear, clear!” he shouted. “How could we be so stupid. Everything pointed to it. The mask of the president—it identifies the victim. Binoculars—to observe his arrival. A sniper rifle—for the act itself. That was the secret message in all the stories. And that’s all the song alludes to.”

“In the song, it was only a fantasy,” Bob continued. “Thank goodness! But with our Wolf Face?” He looked at his friends. “We must tell Cotta!”

“We really must,” Jupiter agreed. “But only under the condition that we are allowed to be present at the police action.”

14. A Suspicion is Substantiated

The way back to Headquarters took a little longer, but now it was well planned. Because The Three Investigators rode on their bicycles past the streets and places which the president would pass the next day. The retirement home, which he was to inaugurate in the morning, was already swarmed with security forces. All cars had to leave and all waste baskets were removed. Too great was the danger that somebody would put a bomb there.

They had called Inspector Cotta from Bob's house. He was very shocked by their discovery, especially as he hadn't the slightest clue as to who Wolf Face could be. Rodder was left out for logical reasons and Jupiter had not mentioned his suspicions about Miss Harding on the telephone as a precaution. But Cotta had told him how the psychologist had got her job.

"She did an internship with me a few months ago as part of her studies and I liked her very much. When a new position was to be filled recently in Los Angeles, I warmly recommended it to my colleagues there."

"Where did she study?" Jupiter had asked and immediately gave the answer himself. "In Seattle?"

"How do you know that?"

"Professional secret," Jupiter had said, thinking of the sweatshirt Miss Harding had worn when they first met. Perhaps even Mary could still be useful, after all, her father was a university lecturer there.

Pete wanted to take a small detour to enquire about Rodder's rented boat at the harbour.

"Maybe you want to avoid Mary," Jupiter teased, but Pete nodded.

"Maybe Rodder got the boat to escape," Pete suspected. "Tomorrow one of his accomplices is carrying out the assassination and then it's off to sea, while on land all roads are immediately closed. It's better that I check it out." Pete said goodbye and shortly afterwards Jupiter and Bob was back at the salvage yard.

"But now we have to save Uncle Titus!" Jupiter looked around searching. "He's probably going crazy."

"I hear something up ahead," Bob replied as Uncle Titus and Mary appeared just behind a timber pile.

"What? Back so soon?" Mary greeted them.

"It's all right," muttered Uncle Titus. He looked as if he'd been dragging iron bars all morning, and looked at Jupiter with a frown. "One week of fixing furniture is not enough," he whispered to him, before he pulled away towards the house.

Jupiter smiled and asked Mary to ask her father about a former student in his university, Hannah Harding. He even asked her to use their telephone. "You should call home from time to time," Jupiter suggested.

"If that wasn't a mistake," Bob said when she disappeared into the trailer. "We'll probably have to cut the line at some point to keep our phone bill from shooting up sky-high."

"Okay," Jupe said. "We'll give her five minutes." When Mary hadn't shown up after fifteen minutes, Jupiter and Bob cautiously entered Headquarters. Mary was about to tell her

father in detail how sweet she thought Bob was. Only then did she notice them and faltered for a moment.

"Say hello to Uncle for me," Bob shouted, pretending to have heard nothing.

In the meantime, Jupiter crept behind a shelf and pulled out the phone plug for a few seconds. It took quite a while before Mary noticed the interruption in the conversation.

"Hello," she suddenly shouted into the receiver. "Hello! Funny, this line's been disconnected."

"Let me see." Bob picked up the phone. "Really?" He looked at her with a serious look. "Well, anyway, you'll have told him the gist of it, haven't you?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"So did you get anything?" Jupiter asked.

"Get what?"

"Hannah Harding."

"Oh, yes, yes. That's funny. She was a student of my father's colleague. Very good, by the way. Anyway, this colleague, we've often barbecued with him..."

"What about Miss Harding?" Jupiter said calmly.

"Oh, yeah!" Mary shone at Jupiter. "You know what? That's the real deal. Tomorrow the president is coming, if that's not a coincidence."

Restlessly Jupiter stepped uneasily from one foot to the other.

Bob had put his arms on his hips and listened devotedly. "What's the coincidence?" he asked.

"The coincidence is that she wrote a thesis about another president!" Mary said. "Kennedy—the assassination."

"About the Kennedy assassination? No!" Jupe exclaimed.

"Yes!"

Jupiter was speechless for a moment. "Mary, you have helped us a lot," he thanked her and she smiled.

"Why are you interested in that woman?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow," Bob said, looking at Jupiter with a meaningful look.

At that moment they heard footsteps outside. "That'll be Pete!" Bob quickly jumped to the door and opened it. "Oh! Who are you?"

"Sandy Allen," said a girl with a black strand of hair. "I wanted to ask if Jupiter is here."

"Jupe, for you," Bob said and turned around with a grin. "It's probably about a new scuba gear."

"Cut the nonsense, Bob." Jupe pushed right past him. "Hi, Sandy, hold on, I'll be right out."

Only then did he notice what she was holding in her hands. "What have you brought with you," he asked in a soundless voice.

Sandy looked at him startled. "What's the matter? It's only the mask of the president. Almost everybody has it these days."

"And you bought one too?"

"Me?" She laughed. "No. It was here on your doorstep."

"We had really only been at Headquarters for a few minutes! And suddenly the mask was there?"

Jupiter, Pete and Bob sat on some old skateboards in the salvage yard and discussed on how to proceed. Mary was now with Bob's mother and Jupiter had arranged to meet Sandy for the

evening. Since noon, it had become noticeably warmer and the wind had died down.

"Better weather now," Bob commented, blinking into the sun. But the better weather was not the only reason for them sitting outside the trailer.

"In the short time we were talking in the trailer, Rodder or Harding or one of their cronies must have been here," Jupiter took up the subject again. "Bob, then this note under the windshield wiper of your Beetle was no accident either. Wolf Face knows we're after him."

"He's probably even spying on us," Bob said.

Jupiter nodded and rolled nervously back and forth on his mobile base. "At least here, we can see everyone approaching." He looked around. "What could he have learned if he had been listening in on us? Maybe we should check Headquarters for bugs again."

"Wouldn't be wrong." Bob turned to Pete, who had been listening the whole time. "What about Rodder's boat?"

"It's a fast boat," he said. "He picked it up this morning. I guess to anchor it off the cliffs at his house. We have to check."

"Okay," Jupe agreed.

"So what's our plan, Jupe?" Bob looked at the First Investigator.

"The police are not watching Rodder, but he's involved somehow. I think Pete's visit yesterday proved that. As of this moment, Miss Harding is clearly the focus of our attention. There seems to be a connection between the two." Jupiter paused, but Pete didn't protest this time. The psychologist's thesis had blown the case wide open.

"Probably she was fixated on this crime by an event in her life," the First Investigator surmised.

"So our two approaches are Rodder and Harding," Bob noted. "Rodder, in particular, should be monitored, since the police won't."

"Right," Jupiter confirmed. "Apparently, the construction looks like this—Miss Harding can inform Rodder of any police activity. That's why they can be so sure that nothing will go wrong. But we are the big unknowns in the game. We're uncontrollable."

"Then Harding could have done better if she had involved us from the beginning," Pete threw in.

"She probably underestimated us," Jupe added. "But now, they have to do something about us..."

"Absolutely!" said Bob. "And since we're still poking around in this case, they're now spying on us."

Jupiter nodded. "Yes. We should not tell anyone about our surveillance of Rodder."

"Best we announce that Pete and I are going away for a few days," Bob interjected.

"Jupe, you already have a date with Cotta during the president's visit."

"That's right." Jupiter had dealt with it over the phone. Cotta was agreeable, because he hoped to have Jupiter under control in a way. "I asked Cotta not to tell. We can rely on him. So let's calmly claim that we'll lead everyone away. Let's just say a hot lead led us to San Diego and that we were monitoring a ship's captain."

"Which is not so wrong, at least the latter." Bob couldn't help but grin.

"Well, we too have learned from the letters," Jupe said.

"Okay." Bob nodded. "So when do we start the surveillance, Jupe?"

"I think tonight. The president's due to arrive in Rocky Beach tomorrow morning at 10 am. If something is planned against him, preparations are already underway."

Soon the three shifts were divided up. Pete was supposed to start the surveillance in the evening. Jupiter would relieve him at 11 pm. At 4 am, Bob would take over.

Jupiter would sleep for a few hours and then, as discussed with Cotta, go to the police surveillance point at a hotel opposite the retirement home. At 8 am, Pete was to join Bob again. From then on there would be two of them.

“And Sandy?” Bob asked. “Sorry about earlier, by the way. I think she’s very okay.”

“She is.” Jupiter smiled at Bob. “I’m free until 11 pm tonight.”

“Uh-huh.” Pete got up. His back began to hurt. “And what do we tell our parents?”

“It’s best if you tell them you’re all sleeping at my place,” replied the First Investigator. “One of us is always in the trailer to answer any phone calls.”

“Well, off to the adventure,” Bob said. “I suggest we take my Beetle for the action. It’s not as flashy as Pete’s MG. I guess Wolf Face will know it anyway.” He threw Pete the car keys. He had no trouble catching it with his left hand.

“Aye aye, Captain.”

15. The Surveillance Begins

Right on schedule, Pete parked Bob's Beetle at a parking bay which was not visible from the street. From here he could easily observe Rodder's house, which was below the edge of the hill.

Pete reached into the travel bag, which was on the passenger seat and in which they had packed a mobile phone, a sleeping bag, sandwiches and a big bottle of Coke. He looked for the binoculars that he had quickly picked up from home on the way to Rodder's place.

In the warm evening light, a boat swayed in the waves of the Pacific. Pete focussed the binoculars on the boat. It was the speedboat rented by Rodder, anchored at the shore. So he had guessed correctly.

Pete then focussed on Rodder's house. Someone seemed to be there, at least two windows were lit up, but the curtains were drawn.

By mobile phone, Pete gave his observations to Bob, who was at Headquarters. Then he turned on the radio. There was a report on the planned visit of the president. This was followed by an interview with the director of the new retirement home. Moderately interested, Pete followed the conversation and locked the doors of the car. The big wait began.

Time passed very slowly. Pete suddenly caught himself stringing together distant thoughts and ideas. His eyes were following the flight of birds or the course of the sea, which was constantly approaching the West Coast. He pulled himself together and concentrated again on the surveillance.

Around nine, he nodded off briefly. When he awoke, the night had plunged the surroundings into darkness. At Rodder's house, everything seemed unchanged. Pete took a sip of Coke, looked for the sports channel on the radio and pulled the sleeping bag over his legs.

Sometime after half past ten he must have dozed off again. Pete was startled when suddenly someone knocked hard against the car windows. It took a few seconds before he finally realized that it was Jupe who was looking in at him through the side window. "Gee, Jupe, you scared me."

"You're not supposed to sleep in here either, Pete. Anything special?"

"No. Nothing. There's Rodder's boat out there."

"There you go! You were right!"

Pete got out and Jupe pushed his bike towards him. Then the Second Investigator noticed a dark shadow just a few metres away. "Careful, Jupe," he hissed and pulled his friend back.

"Don't panic, that's Sandy," Jupiter said calmly. "She accompanied me here."

"Oh, yeah?" Pete was surprised.

"If you have someone to talk to, at least you won't fall asleep," he said. "Or are you going back with me now, Sandy?"

She laughed and got off her bike. "No, Pete. I can't keep up with your pace anyway."

"Well, good luck!" Pete got on Jupe's bike, disappeared in the dark, and the Beetle got two new guests.

Bob arrived on his bike at ten minutes to four. His night had been decidedly too short, but the ride through the cool morning air had put him back on his feet.

On the last few metres, he switched off his lights so that the two in the car would not notice him. He parked his bike, and then put on the mask of the president, which he had bought at a petrol station.

Crouched down, he approached his Beetle. When he reached the passenger door, he paused. Jupiter and Sandy were having a heated discussion about a movie *Rush of the Deep*.

With a jerk Bob straightened up and pressed his masked face against the side window. "Vote for me!" he shouted.

The effect was overwhelming. Sandy disappeared under the sleeping bag. Jupe, on the other hand, jumped up and knocked the inside mirror out of position.

"This has gone way too far!" cried Bob and took off the mask. "You're wrecking my car!"

Jupiter stared at him for a moment. Then he opened the door in a rage. "What were you thinking?" he shouted. "I got a huge bump!"

"It's not the first one in this case," Bob retorted, "and if you keep on sleeping like this, it won't be the last. Be glad. It could have been Wolf Face!"

Sandy had resurfaced in the meantime. "Well, Bob," she cried. "We lost track of time."

"All right then, get going," Bob grinned. "My bike's over there, Jupe. I guess there's nothing special to report, is there?"

"You see, everything is dark down there," said Jupe, who had calmed down again. "Oh yes, we're out of Coke."

"Thanks for finishing it up," Bob replied. "But your faces made up for a lot."

Jupiter patted him on the shoulder. "Stay awake, dude."

"Sure, I have to save the president!" Bob remarked.

Jupiter laughed. "America is counting on you, Bob."

"Get out of here!" Bob cried,

Jupiter got onto Bob's bike. He and Sandy then disappeared into the night. Bob watched them until the tail lights of the two bikes were no longer visible. Then he got into the car, turned on the car radio and searched for his favourite channel.

It was already dawn when something happened down there in the house. Bob almost didn't notice it. A light came on. Wolf Face had got up!

Bob turned off the radio and grabbed the binoculars. But at first, nothing happened. So he put the binoculars down again and took the phone. After a long ringing, Pete finally answered. Bob informed him about the latest developments.

"Okay." Pete yawned. "I'm dead tired."

"All right." Bob looked down at the house. Rodder seemed to take his time. "What do you think of Sandy?"

"Sandy? I've hardly seen her. But I think she's all right. She is, though..." Pete faltered.

"However, it bothers you deeply that she chose Jupe and not you?"

"Whatever gave you that absurd idea?"

Bob smiled. "It's just at the back of my head, or whatever this thing is called."

"I think you just wanted to wake me up properly," Pete said and laughed. "I really have to go to the bathroom. Well, see you later, buddy."

"Bye."

Bob put the phone away again and sat back. He felt fatigue overtake him. But then suddenly the door of Rodder's house opened. A man came outside. Bob could see through the binoculars that he was wearing a mask. And so it began.

Wolf Face got into the car. Bob put away the binoculars and started the engine. Rodder had to go past him. The small feeder road from the settlement to the higher coastal road led directly past Bob's observation post.

Without turning on the lights, Bob turned his car around. Behind a large waste container, which covered him to some extent, he stopped the car and looked for the mobile phone. He had to let Pete know. But just when he pressed the first digits, Rodder's dark vehicle was already coming up the road.

As it drove past him, Bob could get a glimpse of the driver. Involuntarily he flinched. He wasn't wearing the president mask, he was wearing the wolf's. Bob also saw that he wore a black leather jacket. He threw the mobile phone onto the passenger seat and waited until Wolf Face had passed the next curve. Then he started.

Rodder drove fast, but not too fast. Bob dropped back a little so as not to be seen. There was no traffic on this side road yet, so every car was conspicuous. After a few bends, Rodder had reached the coastal road and turned onto it.

Bob let the engine of his Beetle roar. Now it was important not to lose sight of Rodder. When he saw the intersection in front of him, he noticed a third car in the wing mirror. A silver Chrysler was also heading for the coastal road. It slowly approached behind him.

Why not, thought Bob, probably someone on an early shift. He had to wait for two cars to come in from the left on the main road, then he drove on.

Despite the two cars in front of him, Bob managed to keep an eye on Rodder's car. The silver Chrysler was now also heading towards Rocky Beach, but held back a bit. Suddenly Rodder picked up the pace.

"Curses," Bob muttered. He couldn't follow, because the two cars in front of him were strictly adhering to the speed limit. The Beetle's engine was too weak to overtake and the coastal road was too winding. After all, he did not want to risk his life. He looked in his wing mirror. Was he wrong or was the silver vehicle now coming closer?

The road led around a ledge. When Bob came onto the straight road, Rodder's car was almost only recognizable as a dot. But now the road was clearly and freely in front of him. He had the chance to overtake! Bob steered into the opposite lane and pushed the accelerator down to the stop. The old Beetle gave its best.

Slowly he pushed himself past the first of the two cars. A woman sat behind the wheel and turned around to Bob, shaking her head. He smiled at her. Then he checked his side mirror and was startled. The silver Chrysler had also swerved and followed right behind him. It almost touched his bumper!

As fast as he could, Bob overtook the second car and steered back into his lane. Just in time, because now a truck was coming towards them. The Chrysler was gonna be close. But it howled, sped forward, pushed the detective onto the stony shoulder and shot off.

"Idiot!" shouted Bob as he desperately tried to get control of the rolling vehicle. He had noticed two men in the car. At least they were apparently not after him, even though the overtaking manoeuvre had been more than rough. Bob got his car under control and steered back onto the road. There was no sign of Rodder anymore and the Chrysler was already a good distance away.

Now only chance could help. When Bob reached the outskirts of Rocky Beach shortly afterwards, the clock was already approaching quarter past seven. The mobile phone beeped,

it had to be Pete. Bob wanted to pull over to answer the phone when he suddenly saw the silver Chrysler in a side street. The two men just got out of the car.

Bob made a quick decision to drop the phone, braked sharply and turned into the street. He passed the silver car and steered the Beetle into the parking lot of a nearby supermarket. His mother went shopping here regularly, but fortunately not at this time of day. He parked his car in a parking space and took the mobile phone, which has since been silent again.

Then he got out. He wondered if Rodder was around. He let his gaze wander over the cars. The black car parked two rows away looked familiar.

Between the parked cars, Bob scurried so close that he could see the licence plate. It was actually Rodder's car. But there was nobody in it.

Bob looked around. A man hurriedly stepped towards the front door of the supermarket. He was wearing a dark leather jacket. That could be Rodder. Bob started to move. The supermarket was already busy. Bob carefully pushed past customers and peered around shelves.

After a few seconds, he found the man in the black jacket. He walked past the beverage shelves towards the checkout area, which was located at the opposite entrance of the supermarket.

To get closer to him, Bob had to walk around a large table stacked with promotional items for the president's visit. In addition to pennants and badges, a few paperbacks were also placed there. Bob's eyes fell on 'The Kennedy Case' on sale for \$3.99. There were even masks on sale there, and they were already significantly reduced in price. At the petrol station, Bob had paid twice as much. Annoyed he wanted to hurry on when he bumped into a girl who had just picked up one of the masks.

"Bob! It's you!"

"Hi, Mary," Bob said and swallowed. "What are you doing here? At this hour?"

"I'm going to see the president later, so I thought..."

The mobile phone started beeping. Bob wanted to pull it out, but Mary put her hand on his arm and pulled him towards her. "Come on. Yesterday we were watching TV and there was a great preview..."

He tried to break free, but Mary was hanging on him like a leech.

"Leave the phone," she said.

The phone ringing stopped. Bob was feverishly trying to figure out how to get away from his cousin. Rodder was probably long gone by now.

"Listen," he began. "I really don't have time now. Jupiter and Pete have disappeared..."

"What? Gone? I'll help you look, Bob!"

"It's better if I go out on my own. Really! You, uh, you talk too much!" Bob blurted out.

She was speechless for a moment. And Bob used those seconds to get away. Before she knew it, he had pushed his way past the checkout line and out the door. Bent over, he ran between a couple of parked cars and crouched behind an off-road vehicle. A look through the windscreens confirmed that Mary hadn't been following him. But he had also lost Rodder.

Again the mobile phone rang. Bob pulled it out and wanted to press the answer button.

"You better not do that!" said a sharp voice behind him. Bob felt the cold metal of a gun against his neck. "Put it on the ground and put your hands up."

Bob obeyed. He didn't dare raise his head. The beep of the mobile phone died away.

16. Waiting for the President

Worried, Pete hung up the phone. Several times he had already tried to reach Bob, but he just didn't pick up. Hopefully nothing happened to him, the Second Investigator thought. Or had he already started pursuing Rodder? Pete looked at his watch. Twenty to eight. According to the original plan he should have been on his way to the observation post by now.

Pete pulled a note from his pocket on which he had noted Cotta's mobile phone number and dialled it. Maybe he could talk to Jupe. It wasn't long before Cotta picked up. He immediately handed it over to the First Investigator, who immediately started talking and told him that all but Mr Ambler were already there.

Jupiter lowered his voice. "Miss Harding is here, too. She seems awfully nervous. And Inspector Cotta still has no clue as to who's behind the threat."

"Jupe, we have other things to worry about." In a few words he told us about his futile calls to Bob.

Jupiter saw no reason to worry, but suggested: "I think you should go there anyway, just to be on the safe side. In the meantime, I will try to find out more from Cotta. Take the bike. The city is full of curious onlookers and you have to get through."

"Okay, Jupe. I'll get back to you." Pete immediately set off on his bike. The closer he got to the city centre, the busier the streets became. Had he driven, he wouldn't be able to get through by car. Even by bike it was slow going. Many of the temporary set up kiosks were already waiting for the first customers. Government party members formed small groups and practised their election slogans.

Pete constantly met people who had put on the president mask. He'd feel funny if everyone was walking around with his face, he thought, and at the last moment avoided a journalist who held a microphone under his nose for a survey.

As soon as he had passed the busiest places, the streets became emptier and Pete reached the outskirts. He pedalled with all his strength. He almost missed a silver Chrysler, which came shooting out of a side street at too high a speed.

"Bummer!" He cursed and pulled the brakes hard so the car wouldn't hit him. The Chrysler sped away.

When he finally arrived at observation post, Bob's Beetle was no longer there. Pete threw his bike into the grass and began to search the parking bay for clues or messages.

From the tyre tracks of the Beetle he could see that Bob had turned around and drove away. But apart from their bicycle tracks and footprints, he found no other clues. There was nothing to suggest unusual circumstances, such as a surprise visitor.

So Rodder must have left and Bob had to follow him. To be on the safe side, the Second Investigator checked the old wooden house. It seemed abandoned. Just as he was about to turn away, he noticed a movement around the house. The side door opened and a man stepped out.

Quickly Pete took a step back and watched the man walk behind the house and shortly after he came out on a bicycle. He jammed a bag in the carrier and pushed the bike off the property.

“If Rodder is still there, who was Bob chasing?” it shot through Pete’s head. Nervously he steered his bike behind the large waste container and waited.

A few minutes later, he heard Rodder come puffing up the hill. It was a strange hissing sound. As the man rode past him, Pete realized the reason—he had already put his mask on and could hardly breathe under it. It was the mask of the president.

The Second Investigator gave him a head start and cycled after him. Rodder went up to the coastal road, but he was not there for long. Soon he turned onto a sandy road and made his way to Rocky Beach. Presumably he wanted to avoid the police road blocks. When they reached the outskirts of Rocky Beach, Pete stopped briefly and also put on the president mask he had taken at Headquarters. This way Rodder could not recognize him.

Shortly afterwards, Rodder parked his bike near a fast food restaurant and took the bag off the carrier. Without letting him out of his sight, Pete locked his bike to a stop sign. Rodder hurriedly stepped into a snack bar and disappeared inside.

In front of the restaurant, Pete discovered a phone booth. He went in and dialled Cotta’s mobile phone number.

“Ambler. Inspector Cotta’s phone.”

“Hi, uh, Mr Ambler,” Pete was surprised. “Pete Crenshaw here. Is Jupiter there?”

“Hello, Pete! Where are you? In San Diego looking for clues?”

“Yes, of course, uh, I’m following the ship captain.” He almost forgot his cover story.

“Good luck, Pete. I’ll get Jupiter. He’s in the other room with Cotta and Miss Harding right now. We’ve taken several hotel rooms and can look straight onto the stage in front of the retirement home. The president is expected in forty minutes. You’re really missing out. Hold on.”

It took about half a minute, Ambler came back in with Jupe, who picked up the phone.

“Gee, Pete, where are you now?”

“I’m chasing Wolf Face!”

“You what?”

“Rodder. Wolf Face. I’ve been after him since he came out of his house. You know what happened to Bob?”

“Bob? I just had a fight with Miss Harding about that. The FBI picked him up. They had Rodder under surveillance. I don’t know the details, Bob hasn’t arrived yet. Rodder seems to have escaped.”

“But is Bob safe?” Pete asked.

“As safe as he is with the FBI. I think he took a beating.”

“Phew... Well, then both of you can start a club!” Pete looked at the front door of the restaurant. There was no sign of Rodder. “What about Miss Harding?”

“She was just hitting on me because we’re still on the case. But that’s nothing against our discussion about who’s probably the better crime series writer. Cotta has already had enough. He’s ordered us to stay in different rooms from now on.” Jupe took a breath.

“And you still have no trace of the assassin?” Pete asked.

“Nothing. Everyone is very nervous. The local police and the FBI are already stepping on each other’s toes. But tell me, how did you actually find him? And what is he doing? Do you need help?”

While Pete was on the phone with Jupiter, a man stepped out of the restaurant. Pete had stopped watching him at first, because he was dressed in grey. Rodder had worn much more conspicuous clothes. But his way of walking seemed familiar.

“Jupe,” Pete quickly said, “I think Rodder is coming. I’ll get back to you.”

“Wait, Pete, should we...”

“Sorry, see you later!”

Jupiter turned off Cotta’s mobile phone and put it on the table where Ambler’s mobile phone was already lying.

The psychologist had been standing by the window the whole time, humming softly to himself. Now he turned to Jupe. “Pete has a lead?” he asked almost casually and picked up the remote control of the TV to turn up the volume a bit.

Jupiter was about to answer when Bob burst in. The bruises on his arms were obvious. “They really got to you,” Jupiter greeted him. “Apparently the men from the FBI are in no way inferior to the local police.”

Bob closed the door. “I was a too nervous,” he answered and then nodded to the police psychologist, “Hi, Mr Ambler.”

“Hello, Bob.” Ambler looked at him suspiciously. “I thought you were on a manhunt in San Diego.”

“Well, uh...”

Jupiter jumped to his side. “It was all a ruse, Mr Ambler. Bob was watching Mr Rodder’s house. We didn’t want to upset Miss Harding unnecessarily.”

“Uh-huh. I see.” Ambler frowned. “Then Pete’s in Rocky Beach, too?”

“Well, yes,” Jupe said.

Ambler nodded thoughtfully. “I see. Good. Bob, tell us what happened.”

Bob reported on his chase, which ended with his arrest by the FBI. “The two men in the Chrysler also had Rodder under surveillance. They were from the FBI and thought I was involved in the case. In the confusion, Rodder then escaped. They’re a couple of dopes, the feds. And if it weren’t for Mary...”

Jupe briefly told Ambler who Mary was. “Mary is not only a nuisance,” Jupiter remarked, “but she’s preventing the investigation of a crime...”

“... Which may result in an assassination of the president,” Mr Ambler continued.

They remained silent and looked at the television screen. To the cheers of the onlookers, the president’s car turned into Kennedy Street. It was now a quarter to ten. And with every metre that the car came closer, the voices of the police officers in the corridor of the hotel seemed to become louder and more hectic.

“Why did Pete actually call earlier?” Ambler asked, without taking his eyes off the TV.

“He is following Rodder,” said Jupiter. “Then he had to interrupt the phone call. I hope he’ll get back to us right away.”

“He’s going after Rodder?” Bob shouted excitedly in between. “How did he find him again?”

Mr Ambler also turned the sound down and turned to him curiously.

“Well, I don’t know if it’s really Rodder,” replied Jupiter thoughtfully. “Pete said he followed that man from Rodder’s house.”

“At his house?” The surprise was written all over Bob’s face. “But I was doing that! Are there two Rodders?”

Jupiter nodded. “In any case, I think it highly unlikely that Rodder would return to his house just to start over.”

“I hope you detectives are still on the right track.” Mr Ambler stepped to the table and grabbed one of the mobile phones.

“Anyway,” he said, looking at the TV, “The president is about to arrive. I have to go now.” He went to the door and turned around for a moment. “Bye, boys!”

Jupe and Bob looked at him in amazement.

“That was a quick exit,” muttered Bob, and turned back to what was happening on the television screen. “Hey, where’s the president’s car?”

“Away,” Jupiter said. “Look, the camera pans around aimlessly.”

“Turn it up!” Bob exclaimed.

“If you wouldn’t keep interrupting, we could understand everything,” Jupiter said.

Suddenly, the mobile phone beeped and Jupiter answered it.

“Yes? ... Huh? ... Pete? Jupiter here, Jupiter Jones... Do you want to speak to Inspector Cotta? ... Hello? ... Hello! ... Who are you?”

He took the phone off his ear. “He hung it up,” he said, and looked at Bob. “I don’t know who he is. Perhaps it was for Cotta, but he just stopped talking.”

At that moment, the door to the room flew open. “Just for your information,” cried Inspector Cotta, “we have diverted the president’s car! The risk is too great.” He entered the room. “Where is Ambler?”

“He went out,” replied Jupe.

Cotta registered it without any visible movement. “I really have other things to worry about now! Oh Jupiter, give me my mobile phone please!”

Jupiter passed the mobile phone to Cotta. He was about to leave when he suddenly stopped.

“That’s not my phone,” he growled and turned it in his hand. “Hey, this is Ambler’s phone! He mixed it up!”

For a moment, Jupiter seemed to have frozen. Then finally his hand moved to his lower lip, a sign that he was thinking intensively.

“Come on, Bob!” cried the First Investigator. “Follow me!”

“Why, Jupe? Where to?”

“Later! Hurry up!”

17. The Wolf Shows His Claws

Pete quickly left the phone booth. If the man in grey, who had just come out of the fast-food restaurant, had anything to do with the attack on the president, it was about time.

It was just before half past nine. Pete was now certain that it was Rodder. On the night he had entered his house, the man who had surprised him wore similar clothes. Only instead of the wolf mask he now wore the mask of the president.

Wolf Face moved forward quickly and chose a direction that astonished Pete. Instead of going towards the city centre, he moved away from it. Was it another deception? He walked through a few streets.

Then Wolf Face reached a park-like area, the centre of which was a one-storey flat-roofed building. It was the art museum where the Greek exhibition was held, which Bob had him them about. But on this day the museum was closed. The focus of all interest was the president. Pete tried hard to remember what Bob said about the exhibition.

‘Beautiful Helen’, a valuable figurine whose counterpart Paris had disappeared years ago, was considered the attraction of the museum. What did this have to do with Rodder? In the meantime, Wolf Face had circled the building and had disappeared in an undeveloped area where all kinds of garbage had been dumped.

Pete carefully worked his way through the rampant bushes when he suddenly saw something flashing. He stopped and carefully bent a branch aside. Wolf Face was only a few metres away. He had climbed a tree and aimed a rifle at the park.

A short, muffled bang, another one. Then the man climbed down, hid the gun in the rusty remains of a refrigerator and climbed back up the tree. From there he jumped into the park.

Pete ran over and pulled himself up by the tree as well. At the top he stopped and looked down to the other side. The park looked beautiful from there. But there were no trace of Rodder.

Pete searched the area. He wondered what Rodder had been shooting at? Then he saw it —only a few shards of glass were left from the alarm flashing light. ‘*I shoot into the light*’ — that was a line from the last letter from Wolf Face. So that’s what he had used his precision weapon for!

With one jump, Pete landed on the grass. He bent down and ran towards the museum. When he crouched around a hedge, he discovered the rope. So Rodder was already in the museum! Pete crept back a few metres and hid behind the hedge.

He waited, but inside, he was thinking. Slowly he realized what a monstrous plan was behind the three letters of Wolf Face. All of Rocky Beach were focused on the president’s visit. There was no better time to steal ‘Beautiful Helen’. With the letters and robberies, Rodder had cleverly set up a false trail. All police activity was focused on the distinguished guest.

But the real crime took place somewhere else, in the outskirts. And the irony of it all was that in all letters, there were also hints of the actual planned crime. All that was needed was to put them in a different context. Pete looked out intensely again. There was still no sign of Rodder.

Did he have a partner on the police force, as Jupiter suspected? Was it Miss Harding?

“Ouch!” Something hit him to the ground. The assailant must have come from behind him. Pete and the man were clutched tightly and rolled across the lawn. The Second Investigator was able to lift up the assailant’s mask a little. He recognized him immediately. It was Rodder!

Rodder was strong. But this time Pete was not so quick to admit defeat. Then something slipped out of Wolf Face and Pete got hold of it. It was a gun. Rodder backed away and stood up. Pete had also stood up and pointed the gun at him. “Hands up, Rodder!”

“You won’t pull the trigger, my friend!” Of course Pete wouldn’t have pulled the trigger. He was even more nervous with the gun than without it. But he tried to fool Wolf Face. “Sure, I’ll pull the trigger. Just like you locked me in that box! I won’t forget this!”

Rodder seemed to be impressed. “What do you want,” he asked carefully.

“That figurine,” Pete said. He pointed his gun briefly at a bundle lying on the lawn a few yards away.

“Damn,” Rodder said. “You guys are like flies. You get rid of one and the next one’s buzzing on your face!”

Pete grinned and took it as a compliment. “The figurine,” he repeated.

Rodder took the bundle and slowly unwound the thick cloth cloths. “I was against letting you play along,” he grunted.

“But Scott Ambler found us so refreshing,” Pete intervened.

“How do you know about Scott?” Rodder dropped one of the cloth towels and looked up.

Pete nodded contentedly. “When he picked me up at your place that night, he whistled a song on the way back. It was ‘Family Snapshot’. Only then I didn’t know it yet.”

“Scotty!” Rodder shook his head. Then he looked at Pete. “When I found you in my yard—well, you were making too much noise, pal. So I called Scott and told him that I’m gonna lock you up now and I asked him to come and take care of you!”

“So Ambler raided Outdoor World?” Pete asked slowly. “And later stole the rifle at the police station?”

“You said it, pal.”

“The man who left your house this morning? Ambler?” Pete asked.

“A diversion.”

“And the president, you have no plans to assassinate him at all?”

“No.” Rodder carefully removed the last cloth. A figurine about forty centimetres tall emerged. It was made of bronze and represented a beautiful woman. But as finely crafted as the figurine was, everything was surpassed by her eyes—they were perfectly clear diamonds. They flashed in the sun, almost blinding.

“The light,” Pete thought. “*I shoot into the light.*” Fascinated, he watched as Rodder slowly turned the figurine in his hands. Sometimes Helen’s eyes would seductively blink at Pete, then again they would sparkle at him angrily.

“Catch!” Rodder suddenly said and threw the figurine to him. Unwillingly, Pete held up his hands. At the same moment, Rodder rushed forward and knocked the gun out of his hand.

As Pete caught Helen, Rodder cleverly caught the gun before it could fall to the ground. “The tide turns fast, my friend,” hissed Rodder. “Now gently put the figurine down on the grass and walk two steps back slowly.”

Suddenly there was that sweetness in his voice again, that wolfish mumbling that Pete hated. Rodder pointed his gun at Pete, walked over and picked up the figurine. Then he pulled out a mobile phone and pressed one of the memory keys.

“Hello, Paris, this is Helen, I’ve been kidnapped...” Wolf Face faltered. “Hello, Paris? ... Who? Jupiter Jones?”

Rodder angrily put the phone in his pocket. "Damn it!" His gun pointed at Pete. "Come on, buddy," he barked. "That way! There's no time to lose!"

Jupiter and Bob ran out of the hotel. The clock showed ten on the dot and hundreds of onlookers waited for the arrival of the president. The two detectives fought their way through the crowd and then disappeared into a side street where the Beetle was parked. "Where are we going?" Bob asked as he turned the ignition key.

"To the boat. To Rodder's boat!" Jupe pulled out his wallet. "I thought of something else," he said and took out a newspaper article. "This is the report on Rodder. I showed it to Sandy. She pointed out to me that there were several people in the picture. I'm afraid I didn't hear what she said."

"So what is it?" Bob asked.

Jupiter did not answer, but looked at the photo. "Indeed," he exclaimed. "I really should have looked more closely!"

"What is it?" Bob shouted, shifting up a gear.

Jupiter held the article under his nose. "And? Tell me I'm wrong!"

"Cut it out!" cried Bob. "Or we'll end up in a ditch. But he had become curious, slowed down and stopped."

Jupiter handed him the paper. "Look at the person in the photo. The one behind Rodder."

Bob needed a few seconds. "That's Ambler!" he shouted. "Sure! He's got nickel-plated glasses and long hair, but I'm sure it's him. So they've known each other a long time! What made you think of that?"

"By the caller on Ambler's phone. That must have been Rodder. I wonder how long they've been working together." Jupe put the article away and looked up. "And I'm afraid he has Pete in his power. And Helen."

"Who?"

While Bob drove to the rocky coast, Jupiter explained his suspicions. "The purpose of all these letters was to divert attention from the real crime—the theft of the precious figurine."

At last, Bob reached the crossroads where the road to the rocky shore left off. He passed Rodder's house and stopped at a small parking lot where there was already a station wagon.

"Hello, that car is from Outdoor World," Bob muttered.

Jupiter ignored the remark and pushed his friend down a steep path along the shore. After a short time, the path forked and led to two sand bays separated by a rock. Jupiter pointed to the right. "Damn it, they're down there. Rodder and Ambler! And Pete's with them!"

"But they're getting into a rubber dinghy. We'll never make it, Jupe!"

"Come on, let's go!" Without hesitation, Jupiter turned left into the neighbouring bay. Bob joined him without comment. It went over a few boulders, past bushes, then finally Jupiter jumped off a rock and landed in the sand. Bob followed a few seconds later.

"Hi, detectives!" they were greeted by a girl. Although she was in a wetsuit, Bob immediately recognized Sandy.

"I'm glad you finally came. The two guys have Pete. They are rowing over to their speedboat." Sandy pointed to the sea. "They should be coming up behind that rock."

Jupiter nodded. "So, all done?"

"As discussed!"

"Excellent!" Jupiter inspected the diving equipment, which was protected by a tarpaulin in the sand. "Did your boss give you a hard time because you wanted to try this equipment out?"

“He’s already nagged.” Sandy assigned Bob an outfit and gave Jupiter a handsome wetsuit. And he looked at it doubtfully.

“The size is right, Jupe.” She smiled. “Too tight isn’t good either!”

18. A Good Haul

Rodder's motorboat was almost two hundred metres off the beach and it took a few minutes for the three divers to get to it. They were almost reaching the boat when Jupiter stuck his head out of the water and saw Ambler standing with his back to him, hoisting the rubber dinghy onto the ship. Rodder and Pete must already be inside the ship.

Jupiter went under the water and signalled to the other two. Bob and Sandy then swam to the small ladder at the stern of the boat. Bob removed his scuba set, passed it to Sandy, and then he held on to one of the air cushions on the side near the ladder.

The First Investigator swam to the bow of the ship. Below a porthole he came to the surface again. Immediately he recognized Pete's voice, which penetrated to him.

He sounded frightened. "What are you gonna do with me now, Rodder?" he shouted. "Jupe and Bob will save me for sure!"

"That's what you think, my friend." Jupiter knew that voice from the phone. "Your fat friend is waiting for the president at the hotel. And Bob needs to recover from the beating the FBI gave him." He laughed sarcastically. "Hey, Scott, you okay?"

"The dinghy is inside," Ambler replied. "We can take off right now."

"And what are you doing to me?" Pete interjected.

"Throw you into the sea, far out," grunted Rodder. "To the sharks. So we can finally have peace from you."

"But, Roddy, no killing. That was the deal." Fortunately, Scott seemed to be frightened by this prospect.

"Let's get going," Rodder commanded.

Jupiter slipped into the water and gave Sandy a sign. She then signalled to Bob, who then quietly climbed up the ladder onto the boat. He managed to crouch behind the cabin to remain hidden from Ambler.

Ambler caught up the anchor and started the engine. Now it all came down to it. A gurgling sound came to Jupiter's ears. A high buzzing sound followed. The First Investigator grinned. Sandy had done a great job. The ropes tied around the propellers had stopped it rotating, so the boat didn't move forward at all.

"Damn!" shouted Rodder. He restarted the engine. The boat did not move.

"What's wrong, Scotty? Are you drunk or something? You stalled him!"

"Rubbish," cried Ambler. "I just turned the key around. I don't understand it either!"

He went to the stern of the boat and tried to bend down to the water. But before he could see anything, Bob came from behind and pushed him into the water.

"What's wrong?" yelled Rodder. "You can go swimming tomorrow!" There was anger in his voice, but also a hint of fear.

"Help," cried Ambler and splashed wildly in the water. "I can't swim!"

Rodder stumbled outside, gun in hand. Ambler wanted to give him a warning, but too late. Bob again came from behind and gave him a strong push. Rodder tipped over the railing and fell into the sea with a loud splash.

Jupiter immediately pulled himself onto the boat by the air cushion. Sandy handed Bob his scuba set, and he helped her up the boat. Then he unfolded the rope ladder.

"Now you're really going swimming!" Jupe shouted and grinned. Then the First Investigator hurried into the cabin to free Pete. Rodder had his hands full keeping Ambler afloat. Importantly, his gun was lying deep and safe on the ocean floor.

"Let us on the ship immediately," Rodder commanded. "You rats."

Bob shook his head, but threw two lifebelts at Rodder and Ambler. Slowly the boat was driven out to sea by the light wind and current.

Jupiter came outside, followed by Pete. Proudly the Second Investigator held 'Beautiful Helen' in his hand. "Thanks, friends," he said. He let the figurine flash in the sun.

"Well, Rodder, the tide is turning so fast!" Rodder uttered a curse while Ambler was busy getting a grip on the life preserver.

Sandy calmly slipped off her flippers. "I think I'll radio the police," she said. "I can handle this."

Jupiter nodded to her. "They should bring a fishing net," he said. "Because we caught two big ones." He sat down on the railing and dangled his legs.

"You, Rodder, had already developed the method of misleading letters in New York, among other things to demonstrate your superiority to the police, who had dismissed them. Hence the wolf mask. You felt like an outcast from the pack."

Rodder threw a devastating look at him that confirmed Jupiter was not wrong.

"We could have come up with this earlier," Pete added. He sat down next to Jupiter. "In principle, even the first two thefts themselves, the theft at Outdoor World and of the rifle, as well as the quotes from the song, were nothing more than to deviate us to the theory of a planned attack on the president. Not to mention the mask."

Ambler, who had pulled himself onto the ring buoy in the meantime, interrupted him. "It took you guys a long time to figure out about that song!"

"Still faster than the police," Bob interjected. "Or their psychologist."

Jupiter reached into his diving jacket. The newspaper article he had stuck underneath was now soaking wet and stuck to his skin. Carefully he loosened the paper, but it crumbled immediately.

"Pity," said Jupiter. "I can't show it to you anymore. An interesting shot of you, Mr Ambler. It proves that you already met Rodder in New York, probably while you were studying. You were fascinated by Rodder and you haven't lost contact with him since then. You have now connected two goals. One, the theft of the figurine, and two... why do you dislike Miss Harding, Ambler?"

"She's taken my job," Ambler shouted and paddled a little closer to the boat. "Actually, I was supposed to get the job in Los Angeles. But then this girl, fresh out of college, came along and sat right in front of me. And your Cotta recommended her!"

"That's what I thought," Jupiter nodded. "And you knew that Miss Harding had written about the Kennedy assassination. That's why you wrote the stories along this line. From then on, the psychologist had nothing else on her mind but the possible attempt on the president's life. Miss Harding herself was thrown into an awkward position—for you, Ambler, of course, an added attraction. I must admit, I suspected Miss Harding too."

"Indeed," cried Ambler. "It was fun watching you two. A real little competition has developed!"

"But there are three of us," Pete threw in a little side glance at Jupiter. "Mr Ambler, how did you actually steal the police rifle? Isn't climbing more of Rodder's speciality?"

"You'll have to find that out for yourselves if you're so smart," shouted Ambler.

"No problem. Jupiter just sat down. "They didn't come in through the window. That was just pretending. They wanted to support the legend of Wolf Face. I only realized later. The

glass splinters of the window were not right! Mr Ambler, you opened the window from the inside and then smashed the glass. There were glass splinters on the right side of the wall!"

"Yes, yes!" Ambler was losing his nerve. "Now let me on the boat. I can't hold on much longer!"

"And how did you get into the weapons room?" Pete asked without being disturbed.

"A little pick pocketing," Ambler said resignedly. "I took the key from the sergeant on duty and slipped it back to him just in time. I had let the rope down off the roof just before."

Bob noticed that they were drifting further and further away. "I'm gonna drop the anchor," he said. Jupiter nodded. Bob lifted the anchor and threw it overboard. After a few seconds, there was a slight jolt. The boat was moored again.

"Well, you know everything now," cried Rodder. "May I ask you something? Why did you, fat smart ass, turn up at Mr Laurent's shop so inappropriately? That's where all this nonsense started!"

"Later, Rodder, I wasn't quite finished with my questions!" Jupiter shouted back while Pete, Bob and Sandy looked at him expectantly.

He kept talking. "I think while we're at it, we might as well get a second story straight, Rodder. The counterpart of 'Beautiful Helen' was the figurine of Paris, which disappeared a few years ago. This robbery has probably never been connected to you before! But then again, Rodder, it was you!" With a look of surprise on Wolf Face, he saw that he had hit the mark.

"Well, your mobile phone call earlier gave me the idea. So you had Paris all worked up years ago. And now your certainly very rich private client wanted to own the second valuable piece—Helen. You should go back to work for good money."

"How do you know it's a private collector?" shouted Rodder, admitting quite a bit.

"It must be a private person, Wolf Face," replied Jupiter. "And one with lots of money. On the open market these figurines are not for sale. Every expert knows them."

Rodder gave up. "You're really smart, guys! A rich man in the movie business. But I don't even know his name. Now, let's get us on the boat!"

Sandy pointed to the coast where a police boat was approaching.

"Well," Jupiter went on to his closing remarks. "Your nice trip will now come to nothing. You probably would have got enough money for the robbery to last you both the rest of your lives, especially since there should be a few dollars left over from stealing Paris."

"That's it!" yelled Rodder. "And it's a damn shame you guys got in the way. It's all Scott's fault!"

He looked at Ambler, who kept paddling on his ring buoy. "Are you still convinced of the refreshing effects from these guys?"

Ambler spat out a load of seawater and abstained from commenting. He was too exhausted to argue. Jupiter folded down the rope ladder again. The police boat had come close by now. On deck, he could already see Inspector Cotta. Miss Harding stood beside him and waved at them.

"I'll have to apologise to her," the First Investigator thought. Just as Ambler was climbing aboard, the police boat was moored alongside.

The next morning Jupiter sat at home and had breakfast. Aunt Mathilda kept him company and tried out her new dumbbells. The weather was fine and Jupiter was in a hurry to get outside. But when his eyes fell on the newspaper headline, he decided to allow himself a few more minutes for reading.

Then Uncle Titus stopped by in the kitchen. “When are you going to start fixing the furniture?” he wanted to know.

“Today is no good,” Jupiter replied truthfully. “Pete has riding lessons and Bob has to look after Mary all day.”

“Oh! Poor guy. So tomorrow?” Titus asked. Jupiter nodded.

“It’s okay!”

Uncle Titus disappeared and Aunt Mathilda took out the dumbbells, which she had quickly made disappear.

“Haven’t you told Uncle Titus anything yet?” Jupiter asked with a grin.

“One thing at a time.” She rolled the dumbbells onto the table. “By the way, Jupe, did you actually remember to pick up my tango skirt at Mr Laurent’s? I thought it should be made tighter.”

Jupiter turned pale. “Oh, no, Aunt Mathilda! Sorry! I forgot,” he stuttered and put the newspaper aside. “Well, actually I did not forget. I was there! Really! But if I tell you now what happened when I entered the shop, I won’t be able to leave here today. And I wanted to go diving after all. The weather is so nice.”

His aunt smiled impishly. “Oh, I see. Then I guess I’ll have to read the short version of your story in the paper. Does it have to do with the president’s visit?”

“Yes... Uh... No. Or yes! But actually...” Jupiter folded the newspaper. “All right, Aunt Mathilda,” he said, taking a deep breath, “get yourself a drink and sit down. You’re about to hear the whole story first hand...”